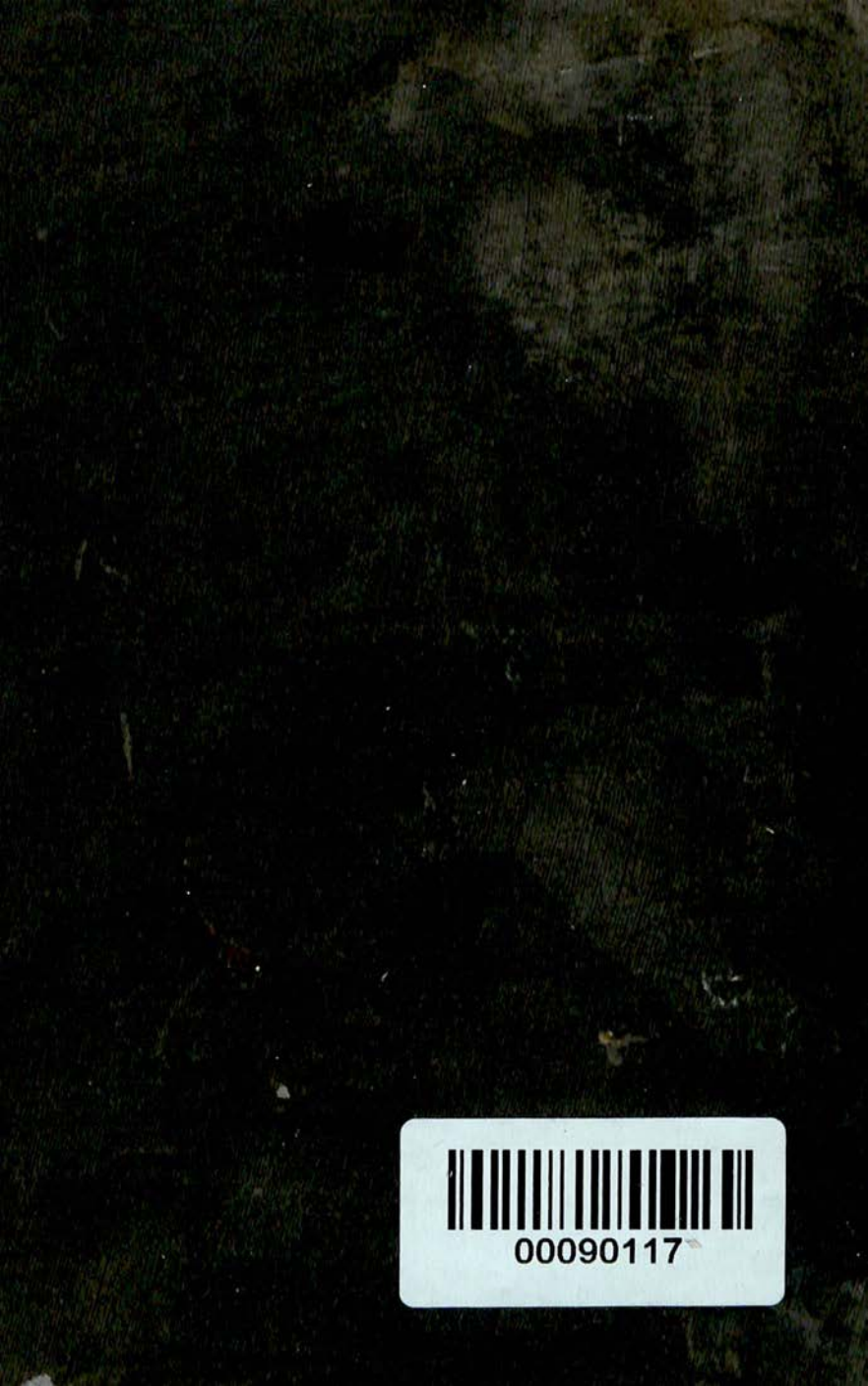
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Half a Dozen Daughters.

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BY

J. MASTERMAN,

Author of "A Fatal Error," etc.

"Life is a tangled skeyne,
For patiente time to smothe."

Old MS.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
HENRY S. KING & CO., 65, CORNHILL.
1871.

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CHAPTER XIII.

DRIFTED APART.

MARGARET opened the sitting-room door; the firelight warmed and sparkled all over the old-fashioned apartment, glancing on Susy asleep on the couch, on her mother seated on a low chair close by her darling, and on Nelly's childish figure stretched full-length on the hearthrug. Mrs. Shrugg held up a warning hand as Margaret put her face in; and the latter softly withdrew, feeling she with her tumultuous feelings had no place in that quiet scene.

Feeling her way up the dark stairs to her own room, she heard her name whispered by Norah.

"Margaret!" she repeated, stealthily coming

down towards her. "Come on, quick,—there's something up, and you're in for it, I can tell you."

"What do you mean?" cried the elder, as the younger sister pulled her into her room and closed the door. "You absurd child, what *do* you mean?"

But Norah held the vantage ground, and enjoyed the position too much to yield it readily.

"Oh! it's very fine to call me absurd," she continued, lighting a candle, and arranging her hair before the glass with the utmost precision.

"But papa's been asking for you ever so many times."

"Mamma knew where I was; so did you all. I suppose you could tell papa?"

"Ah! but that's not all," Norah went on.

"What more then? tell me," Margaret answered.

Norah shook her head mysteriously.

"I can't tell anything for certain," she replied,

"only I expect something is going on,—that's all."

Margaret knew how to treat her sister, and therefore commenced taking off and putting away her walking things, as if she felt no further interest.

Norah could not stand this long.

"And Mr. Dale was here," she began again.

"Oh!" said Margaret, beginning to wash her hands leisurely, "that's nothing new."

"And Mrs. Dale," Norah added, facing her sister, and watching the effect of her words.

"And Mr. John Dale too, no doubt?" Margaret said, trying to continue her unconcern, now really overthrown.

"Oh, no!" Norah replied; "but I can tell you what, Margaret, it's no good you trying to blind me; I know more than you think, and its my belief you'll catch it,—that's all."

"Norah, what do you mean by speaking to

me in this impertinent manner?" Margaret cried, turning upon her younger sister with eyes flashing and head high up.

Margaret could fire up and box impertinent ears too, very soundly, as Norah had sometimes found to her cost. She backed out of reach, and lowered her tone before Diana's warlike mien, and attempted no further play.

"Why, you surely can't suppose we are all blind?" she exclaimed, rapidly. "Even Crocky and Theodore and our Sarah too, laugh when you go out at the garden door. *I* don't say it, mind, but I know they do; and the Wrights, and even Mr. Murkitroyd, grin when John Dale comes dawdling up the street, and then round by the lane,—quite accidentally, of course. *I* never pretend to notice; and I dare say papa and mamma haven't an idea, at least, they hadn't. But as if one could do anything at Clack unnoticed!"

Diana flung aside the towel on which she had been wiping her hands, and sank down on

a chair utterly overwhelmed, to hear how she, with all her pride, had been talked over by these inferiors!

"What do they dare to say?" she said at last,—her fire all quenched and her voice almost humble.

"Oh, you can fancy, but I wouldn't mind, dear. I wouldn't have told you if I'd thought you'd have cared so much; they only suppose you two are in love, that's all."

And repentant Norah put aside her pertness, and assumed an appearance of contrition.

"And what did the Dales come for?" Margaret asked very imploringly; "don't you know, really?"

"They didn't even come up stairs," Norah replied, "not even to see Susy; they asked for papa, and went into his den,—and then papa called for you, and mamma went down. I just went on the stairs to peep over, but of course I couldn't hear anything; and when mamma came up again after they'd gone, she sent

Nelly and me to the garden to get warm. I quite understood, you know; but I couldn't make out much, except that mamma's cheeks were bright pink, and papa went up too, and stayed ever so long."

This wasn't much to alarm, yet Margaret felt the crisis had arrived, and nerved herself to meet it; but before she had made up her mind to go down into the sitting-room, her father's voice rang up the house, calling, "Margaret!"

Mr. Francis Shrugg was very nervous; trouble was coming thicker and faster, and his pride was outraged now. He and his daughter confronted each other in the shabby, half-lighted room,—both on the defensive, each doubting the other. But the father was crushed as well as outraged, for he knew it was by his own act that his children were slighted; yet he felt he must uphold his parental authority, and that authority had already been violated.

"Well, papa," Margaret began.

Mr. Shrugg bade her be seated, and then commenced the attack.

"Mr. and Mrs. Dale have been here," he said, "with very unpleasant news. I find that you have so far forgotten yourself as to receive their son's secret attentions; of all our children I least suspected you of stooping to deceit. His father and mother were very justly annoyed, and kindly assure me it is not so much at John's choice, as at his trifling with the affections of the young lady who was always intended to be his wife."

"That is all imagination, papa," Margaret broke in; "John never paid Grace Exelby any particular attention; it is my position, not hers, that annoys them."

"And do you suppose a small shopman's daughter is a suitable wife for John Dale?" her father asked with bitter pride.

"Papa!" she cried, smitten by the suffering in his voice; "I have seemed to deceive you,

but it went on without either of us meaning to deceive. I met John just now, and he told me his parents were angry, but—he is coming to speak to you to-morrow. You will hear what he wants to say, papa?"

"No; I will not. Margaret, are you so infatuated as not to see how such a course would lower me? Can I pretend to friendship with the father, and yet encourage the son to rebellion? Had Bell acted as you have done, would you not have been the most annoyed of all of us?"

"Papa, John is clever,—he will make his own way in life; why should he throw away his happiness because society is prejudiced?"

"Nay, nay!" Mr. Shrugg interrupted; "be yourself, child, don't try sophistry; it is a mere question of right and wrong. Do you think John Dale would continue always to think highly of a woman who encouraged him to disobey his parents?"

Margaret could not answer. Alas! here, in

her father's presence, the bright future she had allowed John Dale to plan, and which had from his lips sounded so right and plausible, lost its roseate hues, and resolved itself into what her father called it, a mere question of right and wrong. Pride had always proved her wrong. Love only deemed her right in listening to her lover. And now, as all the influence of her home education returned to her in the absence of the glamour of her lover's persuasion, she felt she could not conscientiously continue the argument. She felt now only that she had deceived her father; had acted an unladylike part in carrying on what was neither more nor less than a clandestine engagement; and yet, while she acknowledged all this, and convicted herself of ingratitude and immodesty, she thought she must die if it all ended thus.

Both father and daughter had begun the interview with hostile feelings towards each other, but pity for each other's suffering had

acted most powerfully on their generous natures; and the elder gave up his right to command, as quickly as the younger acknowledged that right.

"It is all wrong," Mr. Shrugg said, sadly. "We all know our real position as gentlepeople is unchanged by the mere loss of money; but the world's verdict is not given according to what was, but to what is. Neither you nor I would like to be treated condescendingly, love?"

"No, papa,—but if you would just hear John. You know we do not care for the world if only our nearest relations are satisfied; and he is nearly sure Mr. and Mrs. Dale would soon come round, if they saw their opposition was useless."

"If you had heard Mr. and Mrs. Dale to-day, you would scorn to accept their forgiveness; it was not altogether what they said, but what they inferred, that wounded me so deeply. And then, too, Margaret, I am

not even a prosperous tradesman. Poor Susy's illness has prevented me saying what I must to your mother. But even here, living as we do, in this mean, poor way, I am unable to pay my way."

"Papa!"

"Your mother's little income keeps you all in dress, and I have no rent to pay; but there are Johnson's wages and the boy's and Sarah's and food and stock expenses; and the custom does not cover the stock."

He said all this with dreary voice, and drooping head; and her heart bled for him. With all this trouble, how could she add to it? For the time, her own sorrow went out of her mind, and her high spirit at once gathered up its forces to meet the emergency which threatened the whole family.

"But papa!" she said, drawing her chair close to his, and laying her hand on his. "Wouldn't it be best to see what should be done directly. The longer this goes on the worse it will be."

"But what *can* be done?"

He turned so eagerly to her, as if half his care had already vanished in making it known.

Two or three schemes were already in her head.

"We are in a false position here in every way," she cried. "You are not fit to keep a shop, papa. Couldn't we let the house,—or the shop,—and you and mamma manage to live on the rent and mamma's hundred a year. We can work,—not Susy, of course not,—but Bell and I, and Norah soon. We had better go. Oh, let us all go!"

Woman-like, she would have flown off at once from the scene of her sorrow.

"But who is there to take the business?" Mr. Shrugg replied; "and where could we get so good a house,—such cheap living, too,—and among people who know us?"

"Then, papa, you must try to get a place in a public office. Mr. Robert Shrugg's

friends could help you,—they are in office now."

"I wouldn't let him help me before," he sighed; "but now my pride must sink again. I'll tell your mother, if you think that is best; but she is so anxious about Susy—"

"O papa, do tell her,—it isn't fair to let her remain in this false state; and perhaps it will be good for her to have her mind diverted. She looks quite as ill as Susy."

"Well," he said, rising, "we'd better go upstairs, now; it must be teatime."

Then, as if just recollecting what had brought about this interview, he added,—

"But now, my dear, you see, don't you, John Dale must be given up? At least, unless you choose to set my opinion at nought."

"O papa! Yes; I see he must be given up."

But her tone was unsatisfactory.

"And it won't grieve you,—not after a time?"

"Yes, papa; it will grieve me always." She spoke up with a proud earnestness that showed him the reality of her feeling. "But I see I ought to give him up,—and I can bear it; others have borne greater trials before me."

She went away without another word,—went away up the wide staircase, with a crushed spirit, and a longing heart to let John know, as he never must know, how she suffered in going back from her promise. That little journey up those broad, easy stairs, with her newborn resolution pressing heavily upon her, was an era in her young life; but, dauntless and courageous as ever in public, she opened the sitting-room door, and joined the family circle, no longer as a culprit, but as a princess.

Mr. Murkitroyd sat before the fire amusing Susy with anecdotes of Clack folk. Susy, lying in the glow from the hearth, looked fresh and rosy; and when she smiled, as she did oftener now than before her great loss, the

exquisitely delicate beauty of her face seemed greater than it ever was in her happy, healthy girlhood,—only that her voice never rose in careless song, and the repartee never came with the smile, one might have fancied the shadow was already passing away. Nearly two months had gone since her accident, and she could not yet stand. Mr. Murkitroyd still preached patience, but never hope; and Susy herself never expressed an opinion nor a wish.

"Ah, Miss Margaret!" the surgeon cried; "the old lady next door says you never go 'nigh her now.' I promised to tell you. She's an inquisitive old lady; she only wants to know what's going on at Dale."

As he said this, Margaret's eyes met her mother's. Mrs. Shrugg's expression was angry; she wondered how the girl dare come into her presence so composedly.

"And," continued Mr. Murkitroyd, "Theodore said chaste Diana's silvery beams would

do their poor dwelling good. He thinks old Dale's name for you is so sweetly poetical."

The girls all laughed at the doctor's mimicry; Margaret laughed too, but with a sore heart; and just then the object of their mirth entered the room.

"I salute all!" he cried, kissing his hand round; "and crave your pardon for interrupting so brilliant a gathering; but I want you, *illustrissimo doctore.*"

"Well, speak plain English," Mr. Murkitroyd answered.

"Crocky is out to tea, then," Mr. Theodore exclaimed, "and poor aunt is upset. I want to know how much sal volatile I ought to give her."

"What's up?"

"A coal flew out of the fire. I say it was a purse; she declares it was a coffin. It flew at me, and she is sure I'm going to die; it's no use my saying I'm too tough. However, she got nearly over that till she heard the

bell tolling,—the big bell that only tolls for the nobs, she says; and that foolish Anne came in and told her the black cat had sneezed three times."

"The bell hasn't tolled," said Mrs. Shrugg.

"Of course not," cried the doctor. "If it had she wouldn't have been frightened; but you may as well try to fly without wings as to reason with superstition."

"I'm afraid there's something in it," Mr. Theodore added. "Don't you remember the shroud in the candle just when your brother died?"

"There!" cried the doctor, "listen to him, Miss Susy. Here's this Admirable Crichton, this mould of fashion, this speaker of many languages, this travelled man of the world, confessing to the weakness of an old woman!"

Mrs. Shrugg went next door with the two young men, and found the old lady very much excited. "She'd nivver heard t' big bell toll since t' old Squire Shrugg died,—it t'were a

warning, it t'were. She knew some'at would happen, for she'd been thinking o' burying cake too; and she wanted Crocky, to tell her, while she thought on it, not to put currants in her burying cake, they were not wholesome."

"Oh, oh!" Mr. Murkitroyd cried, mixing a strong glass of gin and water for her as he spoke. "Don't you suppose you are going to put any one to the expense of a funeral yet awhile; you're good for another twenty years yet. You have to dance at Theodore's wedding before you've done."

"Nay nay, sir," said she, "I'm almost tired o' Clack, and Clack's had enough of me, and t' shroud's a'most yellow wi' lying by. You've never seen it, mum, have you?" she asked Mrs. Shrugg.

"And can you believe it?" Mrs. Shrugg said, when she was back in her own house, "Mr. Theodore had to go for her grave clothes for me to see. They were all in a drawer,—

clean sheets for laying her out; a shroud made by herself years ago; a frilled cap; and a pair of white silk gloves. She quite revived with the pleasure of seeing all were of good colour still; and now she's quite herself again."

"It's a custom amongst the lower orders here," Mr. Shrugg said. "The women are as proud of their own made shrouds as you were of your wedding gown."

All that evening Mrs. Shrugg watched Margaret, though she hardly spoke to her. While Margaret, restless and miserable, thought bedtime and quiet would never come.

Buoyantly, like a bridegroom, rode Johnny Dale full speed up Clack High Street, next morning; he had dressed himself in his newest clothes, and wore a white camelia in his coat. A dashing, handsome suitor for any fair lady to be proud of, was he; and as he leaped off his saddle, and drew off his right hand glove to run his finger through his curly hair before

entering the chemist's house, Miss Crocodilla Clacker might well be excused for saying, as she peeped at him over the wire blind,—

"There now, if I were a young lady, I'd set my cap at young Mr. Dale; he does look so sweet in his Sunday clothes."

"Ay, but you shouldn't let him see you keeking at him," said her mother, with pardonable maternal vanity. "Young men is so vain, and they break girls' hearts as they'd break egg-shells."

Margaret heard the hopeful voice of her lover, as he asked for Mr. Shrugg; and then the door of the back room shut the two gentlemen in together, and half an hour of intense suspense followed.

Mr. Shrugg had, after all, consented to receive him. Mrs. Shrugg thought he ought to do so, that the young man might thoroughly understand there could be no appeal. Mrs. Shrugg had partly forgiven Margaret's deceit; indeed she had been so overwhelmed with

the revelation of her husband's bankrupt position, all else seemed of small importance. As Margaret had foreseen, this new anxiety had acted healthily on the poor mother, and forced her to instant action. So, primed for the struggle, poor Mr. Shrugg once more experienced the difficulty of paternal duties.

John Dale fought his battle well. He only saw in Mr. Shrugg's new difficulty a more powerful reason for him to resign one of his children to another's keeping; and when the father preached of proper pride, he irreverently said—"Bosh!"

Nevertheless, Mr. Shrugg defeated him in the end; and then when John saw he was in earnest, and heard how Margaret acquiesced in all, he became wrathful.

"He was no boy," he said, "to be scolded out of a whim. He had a man's affection for Margaret, and if he chose to work for the woman he loved, it was no one's business but his own. If Margaret came to him and perjured

herself, then he was bound to bear the blow as best he might; but until her own lips told him so, he should leave no means untried to carry his point." And then he seated himself more comfortably, and looked at Mr. Shrugg as if he meant to remain there till Margaret indorsed her father's words.

Oh how glad Margaret was when her father came and gave her leave to try to convince her lover. All the night in her sleeplessness she had thought if only she could herself give him the verdict, they both would bear it better; but when she stood before him, and saw him spring up flushed and eager to meet her, she shrunk back against the door, and could not find voice to speak. But he interpreted her eyes aright, and stopped before her without touching her.

"I couldn't have believed," he cried, "you would change so soon; but you haven't the power to be capricious now. You must keep faith."

"I gave you my word," she said; "but remember, it was dependent on papa's consent. He is very kind, John, he has forgiven my deceit."

"Oh yes!" he replied, "he is prouder than my people; and so are you. You profess to care for me, and yet you will not accept the slightest sacrifice from me,—and it is no sacrifice," he added, his voice becoming soft and pleading, "it would make my life real and earnest, and oh, love, so happy!"

She came away from the door and gave him both her hands.

"Dear love," she whispered, "indeed I am thinking of your real happiness more than my own. You will thank me some day for seeming to be hard-hearted now."

"My Margaret," he murmured, bending his face close to hers, "don't take this exalted view; it is only fit for Miss Porter's high and mighty heroines. Let us be honest,—let us be

all the world to each other,—let our hearts guide us now."

For an instant she could neither think nor speak; the love that shone in his eyes penetrated and satisfied her soul. Spellbound by the bliss of the moment, she was conscious of nothing else; but John broke the spell, and recalled her to reality.

"Shan't we be equal too?" he added. "You give up your home,—I give up mine; but what shall we not gain!—a home of our own, an independence, unrestrained companionship? You will be firm this time. You will be my wife, let them say what they will."

She repelled his tightening arms, and wrenched herself from his embrace.

"No, no," she exclaimed; "I dare not. We must wait."

"Wait!" he repeated. "Wait, till what,—till the millennium?"

Should she let him be angry? Would it not be the easiest way to make him go? The

easiest, no doubt, but neither brave nor kind; and Margaret's noble heart could not spare itself at the expense of another.

"Remember, it has all come suddenly upon your parents and mine," she said. "Who knows how time may reconcile them, especially if they see we are willing to be patient, and unlikely to change."

"I am not so sure about you," John said, gloomily. "It is woman's nature to wait and wait, because they don't feel as men feel."

She was stung by this. "You can't say and think so of me," she exclaimed. "You can't think my life here is so pleasant and luxurious, that I can afford to let my only chance of happiness leave me. If you think women have no feeling, how is it they always suffer most? If you went away now, and I never saw you again, I should never cease to love you, and to long for you,—unless you became unworthy; and even then I should love

and pity you, though I might dread to meet you."

"Oh pity me now," he cried. "I don't say I should go wrong if you throw me over: that would be boyish and cowardly. I would do my best to keep straight and to act like a Christian, and forgive every one; but all the spring will die out of me. I shall have no heart. I can't hope and wait. Besides," he added, breaking out vehemently afresh, "they are deceitful now, and underhand; they came here and never said one word to me; and I should never have known had not your father let it out.

It would not advance this story to detail all the alternate complaints and pleadings that passed in this interview. Margaret had a sore fight with her heart and her pride. Was she right or wrong to keep firm to the last, not to agree to his passionate request?

They did not part enemies when at last John was obliged to go; neither did they separate with vows of undying love. Nothing was

settled, nothing was arranged; they did not take a long or an ecstatic farewell. John merely said gloomily,—

"Well; I see it's no use my staying any longer."

They were both too unhappy to kiss each other, and parted as friends after a morning call.

John rode swiftly home. The letters had arrived in his absence. One for him from a college friend lay on the hall table; it was an enthusiastic account of a proposed tour in Egypt: an artist, an author, and a famous antiquarian were to be of the party,—"couldn't Dale join them; why ever did he keep on rusticating in this way when all the world lay before him?"

The idea was very grateful to John's smarting spirit. Yes, he would go; then Margaret would perhaps find out she could not live without him. He took the letter to his father and mother at luncheon.

"I should like to go," he said.

Mr. Dale winced. The busy time of year was coming on,—the York races, the assizes, the Derby, the show of horses at Tattersall's,—amusements he and John were wont to share together. Then the home pleasures,—the choosing and settling of hounds and stables for the next season, the breeding of game for the autumn sport, etc.; and in all these things he liked his boy to be associated with him. It would all come easier when he had it to do on his own account, the poor father thought. But this proposed tour would keep him away for months, and would also be a great additional expense. Mrs. Dale had no such feeling. It seemed to her the best possible plan to change John's ideas and keep him out of mischief. She combated all her husband's objections; she smoothed all difficulty of getting travelling preparations made in time; and,—she said nothing about her own share in proposing the expedition. John never knew how she had

poured out her grievances into the friendly ears of his college chum's mother, who with admirable sympathy played out the little farce that seemed to the poor unconscious mother a heavenly call to her boy out of darkness into daylight.

If we could but let Providence work out His ways in his own manner, instead of blotching and disfiguring His fair work with our foolish, useless, hindrances!

The following little note reached Margaret a few days later.

"My Margaret,—I am going off to Egypt by to-night's mail. Pray for me, and never forget me. When I return I shall claim you as my wife. Remember this!

Yours ever,

John Dale."

Mrs. Dale flung her arms round John's neck as the train drew up to the little platform at Nunbriar.

He could not respond as warmly, and she never forgot the unspoken reproach.

"God bless you," said the squire, huskily And then the young man was hurried out into the night; while Margaret Shrugg, locked in her room, was doing her utmost to spoil her beautiful eyes over her lover's brief farewell.

CHAPTER XIV.

"WHO CAN TELL?"

THERE was a curious mixture of pride and vexation in Mr. Polkely Seton's feelings whenever he was in public with his two young ladies.

No matter how demurely the two girls sat back against the cushions as they drove through the park, already, owing to an extraordinary early spring, beginning to be thronged with idlers,—male eyes would fix themselves admiringly on the fair young faces so curiously alike; and the windows of certain clubs in Piccadilly and Waterloo Place, would become suddenly alive with manly faces as the handsome carriage was recognised. And the two young ladies knew all this, and understood well what the nervous movement of Mr. Seton's feet meant, and what the orders to the coachman would instantly be should their eyes be found

straying. This knowledge was fun to the sisters together, but Linda knew how tiresome it was to bear alone. Mr. Seton believed all anxiety on Bell's account would soon be given up to his old friend Mowlam, who continued sedulously to come and practise in Hyde Park Gardens, but whose continued silence on the all-important question of matrimony was beginning to annoy him.

"Mowlam's pretence at bashfulness was ridiculous," Mr. Seton considered; and he was already cogitating whether it would not be allowable under the circumstances to break the ice himself. His great dread was lest another ineligible, like Mr. Frederick Lington, should be beforehand. He need not have feared so,—at least not yet; for Bell having gone through the ordeal of seeing Miss Emily's trousseau, and of reading the announcement of her marriage in all the fashionable papers, believed herself to have a seared as well as a widowed heart,—and at this phase of her

existence would have infinitely preferred a nun's to a bride's veil.' She was a brave little creature after all; and inasmuch as she never paraded her sorrow,—never even hinted at it in her long letters to Susy and Norah,—she may be allowed to gush over it a little with her twin sister without detraction from her bravery.' Her partners at balls said she was nicer than ever; for, caring for none she could smile on all; and each foolish young fellow who fancied he had only to ask and have, little guessed that his attention was a matter of utter indifference to her. So far Cupid had spited four out of Mr. Francis Shrugg's six daughters, —save that in Linda's case he had not even professed to have a share.

One afternoon, early in March, the two girls drove to meet Mr. Seton by appointment at a hosier's shop in Bond Street. They were before their time, and preferred sitting to wait his arrival in the open carriage, to the close, warm shop. It was early in the afternoon,

before the long strings of fashionable equipages had begun to distract policemen and pedestrians on business; but the young ladies had plenty to amuse them in the passers-by, who are rarely few in number in that favourite thoroughfare.

They stood opposite a jeweller's shop, and presently there came out of it no less a person than Johnny Dale.

The sisters had scarcely time to remark the unexpected sight, before he was at the carriage.

He explained how he was only passing through *en route* to Egypt, adding, "I am so glad to see you. Will you do me a favour?" and his face became rather red as he produced a little parcel. "Will you give this to your sister Margaret from me? I—I have so little time, and I particularly wish it to reach her safely."

"She shall be sure to have it." said Bell, wondering what it all meant. "I am going to send home to-morrow."

"And will you say you saw me," he con-

tinued, hurriedly, "and that we all are to start to-morrow." Then he talked of other things, and was bidding them good-bye, when Mr. Seton, arm-in-arm with Mr. Mowlam, came up.

Mr. Seton had met his old friend, and had almost perforce dragged him off to accompany him in his drive,—he was in high spirits. Mowlam would sit opposite Bell, and would see the universal admiration the sisters gained. But behold! hardly had he recognised his liveries, when he saw a fashionable young gentleman, whom he had never in his life seen before, holding his own wife's hand, and earnestly talking to both young ladies.

Mr. Dale merely returned Mr. Seton's bow when he was introduced; said something about being sorry to have no time to call; and had gone before the elder gentleman fully understood who his new acquaintance was.

Mr. Mowlam was jocose. "Country beaux and town beaux, eh, Miss Bell!" he cried, as he took his seat opposite her. "Well; one

needn't come to town for good style and good looks if he's a fair specimen,—fine grown young man,—very."

Bell laughed; she was quite willing to carry out the misunderstanding.

"But unfortunately he's going to Egypt to-morrow," she replied.

"Indeed!" cried Mr. Mowlam. "Bless me,—how odd. Do you know I 'm thinking of going as far as the second or third cataract on the Nile this autumn."

"What!" cried Mr. Seton.

"Ah, well; it's only just settled,—I was going to mention it," Mr. Mowlam said, with unnecessary hesitation; and then he went on joking and making himself so agreeable on passing events, that both young ladies cordially backed Mr. Seton's invitation for him to return with them to dinner, and Mr. Mowlam agreed to do so.

Bell and Linda were both sure that the little parcel committed to their care for Margaret

contained a ring; and being equally sure a ring must mean something, were proportionately excited about it; that the engagement,—if one existed,—must also be clandestine, or why should the ring be sent through a second person, was also an exciting idea. And how Margaret, with all her pride, could suffer such a thing,—how she could have fallen in love at all,—was altogether amazing in her sisters' opinion.

Mr. Seton came into his wife's room before he went downstairs for dinner, and dismissed the maid.

"I want to ask you," he said, when he and Linda were left to themselves, "if that young gentleman you met to-day is a suitor of your sister's,—of Bell's?"

"Oh, no!" cried Linda.

"I am glad to hear it," said he; "for I am quite sure Mowlam only wants a little encouragement to ask her to be his wife. He is an old friend of mine,—a very intimate friend; and I shall in his case put aside any false

sentiment, and encourage him to disclose his views."

"Oh, please don't!" cried Linda, fairly aghast at the notion. "It would be like asking his intentions; besides,—"

He put up his hand to stop her.

"Foolish child," he said, indulgently; "you must allow me to be the best judge of what is right. Had *I* acted as ordinary suitors would have acted in regard to you, I should not have had you here now. This is a peculiar case, and my experience tells me false delicacy is frequently sheer folly. I have decided."

Linda opened her lips again, but Mr. Seton stopped her by judiciously administering a little scolding upon her behaviour to Mr. Dale.

"In a crowded street," he said, "in an equipage sufficiently handsome to draw general notice, you cannot be too prudent; and I must say I was shocked to see a lad like that presume to shake hands at all,—much more to keep your hand in his for quite two seconds."

So poor Linda dare not speak up for others, when her own impropriety deserved such censure.

It is very certain that she lost her appetite for dinner; and when she and Bell were dismissed upstairs, leaving the two gentlemen over their wine, their anxiety and excitement on Margaret's account were transferred to their own.

Mr. Mowlam unconsciously cleared the way for his old friend as they sat together, by remarking—as if in pursuance of a line of thought,—

"Very fine young man, that country gentleman,—looks suspicious, doesn't it? Handsome couple they'd make,—very."

"Who,—where?" Mr. Seton asked, thinking he was going to be pumped; and mentally designating his companion as slyer than he had fancied him to be.

Mr. Mowlam laughed. "Oh! these pretty girls," he said; "there's no being up to them. More than coincidence in that meeting, I'd

swear; and such sweet surprise over it, eh! Slyer than foxes these fair pussies are!"

"I think you are wrong," Mr. Seton said, gravely. "Young Dale is a very old family friend,—nothing more. As for the young lady, I don't suppose she has even thought of matrimony. You can't conceive what a simple, unworldly family that is. I don't mind telling you, but actually when I first proposed, the father hesitated to accept,—actually hesitated to accept me, because his daughter was penniless."

"One in a thousand,—nay, in fifty-thousand!" Mr. Mowlam said, admiringly.

"You are very kind," Mr. Seton replied, appropriating the compliment to himself; adding, "of course I might have aspired to title,—it would be folly to pretend to underrate my position; but I have got a lady in every sense of the word."

"A very, very sweet lady," said Mr. Mowlam, emphatically; wondering to himself, as he had often wondered before, how so sweet

a creature had fancied such a man for a husband.

"Yes," Mr. Seton said, with a smile of benignity and self-approval; "even in this world disinterested, honourable conduct is rewarded; and I have never regretted my love match."

"No doubt married life is best, after all!" Mr. Mowlam cried; averting his eyes from his companion.

Mr. Seton tossed off a glass of wine.

"No doubt," he cried; "and I can confidently recommend you to follow my example."

"Ha, ha, ha," laughed Mr. Mowlam very nervously, playing with some dessert. "Well; the truth is, I'm thinking of doing so;" and having said so much, he took up a large pear, and began eating it hurriedly.

"Take care, take care!" Mr. Seton cried, in alarm; sanitary principles overcoming Cupid's. "Gold in the morning, but lead at night, you know."

"What! matrimony?" roared Mr. Mowlam, stopping with the half-eaten fruit on his uplifted fork.

Mr. Seton joined in the laugh, though it was against himself, for he felt very triumphant altogether. Bell's consent was a very secondary consideration with him.

"I knew you were!" he exclaimed; "and I honestly congratulate you. I believe she'll make you a first-rate wife."

Mr. Mowlam nodded. "I wanted to tell you before, but she thought you wouldn't like it."

"She thought I shouldn't like it? Why, my dear sir, have you spoken already?"

"Yes,—but,—"

"Then her sister can't know?"

"Her sister?"

"Yes; my wife."

A sudden light darted into Mr. Mowlam's mind. "Why, Seton," he said, after an instant's pause, "you are not listening to a word

I say. You are a lover yet, I declare, and can think of only one lady in the world. Mrs. Burcham wouldn't tell your wife, though she is her sister-in-law, till you, her brother, knew."

Mr. Seton leaned back in his chair, cold with dismay; but he was sufficiently himself, in the midst of his dire confusion, to take some advantage of the loophole so considerately offered him.

"Ha,—ha;" and it was his turn to laugh nervously now. "Say it again. I confess—I was a little absent."

"Mrs. Burcham and I have long entertained a warm regard for each other," Mr. Mowlam said slowly and distinctly, "but the dear creature had scruples about marrying again. I wanted to let you know from the first; for so near a connection with an esteemed old friend like you is one of the pleasing views in my future."

He stopped for a moment, and his host smiled a ghastly smile, and bowed his thanks.

"But one must let the ladies take their own way in these matters," Mr. Mowlam continued. "How I contrived to let it slip out to-night, I can't imagine; however, my punishment won't be very severe, for she had at last made up her mind to come and tell you, and invite you to the wedding."

"Then it is to come off soon?" Mr. Seton managed to say, composedly.

"Well," said Mr. Mowlam, rubbing his hands, "not till after the April dividends are drawn. She doesn't want to change her name till next quarter, so as to lose as little interest as possible; then we shall be detained till her money is invested afresh. I believe you are one of her trustees?"

"We must go into these business matters another time," his friend said, feeling wholly incompetent to use his brains then. "Any appointment your lawyer likes to make shall be attended to."

Then the guest rose,—said he was surprised

to find how late it was,—too late for any music, he feared; and the host making no effort to detain him, he left adieux for the ladies, and went away without going upstairs.

"We sat talking so long," Mr. Seton explained, when he entered the drawing-room alone, "Mowlam was afraid of being locked out, so went off at once. Where's Miss Bell?"

"She had a bad headache," Linda said. "I told her she must go to bed."

"Quite right."

Then Mr. Seton sat down, feeling very reluctant to acknowledge how utterly he had been hoodwinked. His nature was as incapable of taking defeat pleasantly, as of hiding it by falsehood; but it was mean enough to seek all possible subterfuge. He put his arm round his wife's waist, so that she could not see his face, as he said,—

"You will be surprised to hear what we talked about,—Mowlam is going to marry Mrs. Burcham!"

Linda made an ineffectual attempt to face her husband,—she literally glowed with delight.

"No!" she cried; "then, oh, how lucky you did not speak about,—about what you intended, before dinner."

"Ah!" he answered. "Yes,—wasn't it? I confess,"—people always profess immense sincerity when they act a white lie,—"I confess, Mowlam's attentions to your sister seemed to me lover-like. Mrs. Burcham has been very insincere."

"We thought long ago something was going on," Linda said.

This was another blow. Here were two inexperienced girls seeing what he could not.

"Then why did you not mention it?" he exclaimed. "I really do think your husband, and not your sister, ought to hold the first place in your confidence. I must say I am grieved you treat me, your nearest relation with a reticence, that to speak mildly, in our relative positions is highly blamable."

He felt greatly relieved after this; but poor Linda was quite ashamed of herself.

"I did not like,—she is your sister. I could not be certain," she faltered.

"Well, well," he exclaimed in a forgiving tone, "you are very young, and perhaps hardly aware yet of your onerous duty as a wife,—we'll say no more. I must own, though, I am astonished that a woman of Mrs. Burcham's age should make such a fool of herself."

"Many women marry twice," Linda said, wondering how any one could tempt fate a second time.

"Do you think they are right?" he inquired, with sudden misgivings.

"Oh, no!" she answered, with prompt energy, "I cannot understand it."

Luckily he did not understand her. 'In married life one's nature should be rather obtuse, to ensure unclouded happiness.'

He laid his head on his pillow that night,

congratulating himself upon having preserved his dignity before his wife, at all events. He was not sure about Mr. Mowlam. Still, he questioned whether the latter really read his mistake aright. And next morning he could hold himself as erect and look over his rigid collars with as great an appearance of virtuous propriety as ever.

The girls' delight at this sudden relief was soon ended, for the morning's post brought a long letter from home, turning all their interest on the news it contained. The mystery concerning John Dale and Margaret was cleared,—at least, as far as it was given to outsiders to see clearly; and Mr. Shrugg's increasing difficulties were hinted at. Mrs. Shrugg herself, wrote of these. "Dear Margaret was behaving nobly," she said, "and her parents feared they must agree to her desire to be a governess,—not only because their means were narrowing, but also because active work would be the best tonic

for her mind at present." Mrs. Shrugg added, "it might not be pleasant for Linda to recommend her own sister to her friends,—indeed, Mr. Seton might very naturally object to her doing so; but there would be no harm in her asking their old friend, Mrs. Sims, to do her best in finding a suitable situation,—out of London. In Margaret's absence, Bell must teach Nelly; and the poor mother hoped Bell's luxurious present life would not unfit her for the stern realities of her home.

This intelligence brought an answer overflowing with love and sympathy from the twins to their parents; and in a little note Linda wrote, accompanying John's parcel to Margaret, all the particulars of the interview with the young man were faithfully related,—greatly to Margaret's comfort.

If Mrs. Dale could have known how large a part of her parting present to her boy was spent over his parting present to his lady-love!

Mrs. Shrugg did her best to prevent Susy

knowing of her father's difficulties; but Susy knew her mother's face too well not to notice its increased sadness, and Mrs. Shrugg was only too glad to receive her eldest daughter's friendly sympathy. So the whole family were able to discuss the different plans for warding off increasing difficulties together. Margaret's talents and accomplishments would entitle her to ask a handsome salary as governess; and although they all shrank from the idea for her, she herself longed to realize it.

Within two or three days after John Dale's departure, great news came down by telegram to Clack.

Mr. Robert Shrugg was dead.

"And that old lady next door is madder than ever," Mr. Murkitroyd cried, as he discussed the news with the Shruggs. "For the future, every sound she hears and every dream she dreams will be reckoned inspired by all her neighbours. The little parlour was thronged with gawbies when I looked in just now."

"What are gawbies?" asked Nelly.

"Why, short for gawbissons; and you are a gawbisson for not knowing that," said the doctor, pulling the child's long, fair curls.

"And every one stares at poor Theodore as he goes up and down the street," he added. "I pity the poor chap unfeignedly; it'll be very awkward for him at the funeral, if Squire Shrugg is buried here."

"Then Captain Robin is squire now," said Susy.

"'The king is dead: long live the king,'" said her father. "Poor Robert!—so he's gone too."

As he spoke, Mrs. Robert Shrugg's pony carriage came up to the door; and presently the unconscious widow was ushered in amongst the confused family.

"I can't tell her," cried Mr. Francis, hurriedly, quitting the room by another door. The doctor, followed by Norah and Nelly, followed him. Margaret and her mother received their visitor.

"And how are you all?" Mrs. Robert said, seating herself by Susan's sofa; "Isn't this damp weather dreary? I think the world gets worse and worse. I wish my Robin would come and cheer one."

"Perhaps he will soon," faltered Mrs. Shrugg, wondering how best to break the news.

"No," she answered, fretfully; "any leave he can get, he will spend in town; here's the season close at hand, you know. I don't wonder he likes society,—he, the ornament of all society. 'I don't wonder he's petted and angled for,' my bonny Robin: he'll be a grand catch some day."

"When? How do you mean?" Mrs. Francis asked; saying anything to prevent silence.

"When,—bless me, when he's in his proper place; when his father dies, to be sure. But won't Robert keep him out as long as possible, —just to spite me! Ah, don't I know you, Squire Robert!"

"Life is always uncertain," Mrs. Francis said, longing to stop the bitter tongue.

"Pooh,—naught is never in danger. I wish he—"

"Oh, hush!" cried the other; and at that instant Mr. Theodore entered the room.

"Don't go," he said, as Mrs. Francis rose to leave him to tell his mother. "Don't go; she may faint, or something. Miss Margaret, don't go. I wish one of you would tell her; but Mr. Robert says I—"

"What's all that?" cried dim sighted Mrs. Robert. "Is that Theodore?"

Almost breathless with agitation, Theodore took his mother's hand; all his affectation gone, —nothing left but tender pity for the living, and bitter sorrow for the dead.

"Well!" said she, "how's the old lady? The two old ladies, one will soon have to say; for Crocky must be getting on."

"Where's the captain?" Theodore said; he always so named his brother.

"What's the matter?" exclaimed his mother; her sensitive ear detecting the trouble in his voice. "You know something. Is he ill,—is he dead?"

"No; on my honour, I have heard nothing of him."

"Of his sister, Clara, then. But I've no interest in her, ungrateful child as she is!"

"No; I know nothing of her; but—"

"But,—how enraging you are, Theodore. Speak out,—I know there is something."

"Yes;" cried Theodore; "it is my,—the squire!"

"Robert!" she screamed; "then he's dead?"

She had risen, and her tall figure towered above that of her shrinking son. Her hand had kept tight hold of his hand since he had first greeted her; and now she shook it angrily, as she repeated,—"Then he's dead?"

"Yes; he's dead," Theodore said, briefly.

"My God!" she screamed; "and I am free at last!"

The fierce tragedy of her look and tone was indescribable.

"Four and twenty years ago," she added, still with shrill uplifted voice, "since we parted; and you parted us,—you, the bastard, as he called you. But I am free now for ever."

Theodore's fair face was perfectly white; he was shaking all over, like a frightened woman, while his distended eyes were fascinated by her frantic gestures.

Mrs. Shrugg saw it was time to interfere; but as her soft touch fell upon the widow, Mrs. Robert only became more violent.

"She didn't pretend to sorrow," she said; "therefore sympathy was ridiculous. Why should she sorrow for a man who had ruined her life by his base suspicions. She was glad he was dead; she hoped he was punished at last. And now her Robin was all her own."

Still Theodore could not free himself from her grasp, though his emotion was terrible. His struggles recalled him to her mind.

"Where is my Robin?" she asked him. "Why are you to be the cause of all my pain? It is Robin's place, not yours, to announce his father's death. You were nothing to him." She added this with a half-laugh.

Then the question which had for years rankled in Theodore's breast was forced from his lips,—

"Oh, tell me now," he groaned. "Wasn't he my father?"

She tore her hand from his with a violence that made him reel back; and clasping her fingers above her head, she cried: "Listen; my own child doubts me. Oh, I would die too, only I would rather not meet Robert!"

Fortunately, Mr. Shrugg, hearing her violence, and urged by the surgeon to interrupt the interview on Susy's account, here came on the scene; and his appearance changed the poor lady's mood.

"Do you hear, Francis?" she said. "Robert is dead; we shall never see him again. Do you

remember coming to our wedding? Do you remember the speech he made about me? Oh, what cruel words he lived to say of me! What a wise man he was,—wasn't he? He said he had married an angel. What did he call me a few years afterwards?"

"Oh, don't!" he exclaimed. "See what you have done. Look at Susy!"

They had all forgotten Susy. She lay back in a deep faint: her hands clenched, her brows knit with pain. Margaret sprung to the door and called Mr. Murkitroyd.

The surgeon scolded them all viciously. "Oh, of course," he said; "she is in such a fine state of health she can bear any excitement,—noise and contention are so good for her. Here," he added, taking up one end of the mattress, and motioning to her father to take up the other: "Let's get her out of this, before she comes round." So they carried her to her bed.

"Keep that mad woman quiet," he said to

Margaret. "You are all capital nurses, I must own."

But Mrs. Robert had softened directly she saw the effect of her violence on her favourite. And now she was weeping and wailing, and bemoaning the dead as if he had been the dearest object of her heart.

Mr. Murkitroyd had decided to leave Clack for a few days that very afternoon. He had always a good excuse for returning, as Mr. Wright was still without a partner. He went backwards and forwards between Clack and Leeds two or three times a month.

"Could you put off going till to-morrow?" Margaret pleaded.

"Am I a murderer?" he exclaimed. "Do you think I should leave your sister in that state?" And he took his seat by Susy, watching with ill-concealed anxiety for the first sign of returning animation.

Presently Norah crept into the room.

"Mamma says will you come and see Mrs.

Shrugg? She's made herself quite ill," she said, softly.

"Serve her right," growled he. "No; I shan't come till your sister comes round."

"Then what can we give her?" Norah continued. "She's in hysterics."

"A good shaking," said he; "I don't care what ails her; she deserves all she's got."

Susy remained insensible till the early twilight; and when she again opened her eyes consciously, it seemed as if they would soon close again in death.

Death was overshadowing the dower house, but not on Susy's account.

Mrs. Shrugg herself came for the surgeon next; and seeing Susy was surely regaining strength, she insisted on him going down to Mrs. Robert.

"There is something wrong about her, I assure you," she said when he hesitated. "Her strength has utterly failed, and her face is livid."

"A mad bull exhausts itself at last," he answered.

But he went into the drawing-room, and when he had looked at his new patient, and felt her pulse, he quickly bent his ear to her heart. She took no notice of him; she was mumbling to herself almost incoherently. Theodore stood close to her as she lay back in an old-fashioned easy-chair,—he had neither eye nor ear for ought beside; his mother's face was, as Mrs. Francis had said, livid, and her dark eyes, once so lustrous, were fixed and staring.

"Hûm," Mr. Murkitroyd said at length, "she can't go home just yet. Can you get her things off, and put her to bed here?"

Theodore clutched the surgeon.

"Is she very bad?" he whispered.

"May be," said the doctor. "But just you come along with me, and let the ladies put her to bed."

Down in the back parlour Mr. Murkitroyd forced poor Theodore to swallow some beer.

Then he extorted an unwilling promise from the little man to sit where he was till he had paid another visit to Mrs. Robert.

Mr. Murkitroyd came away from his second inspection in less than ten minutes, and beckoned Mrs. Francis aside.

"Send a telegram off for Captain Robin," he whispered. "She's not likely to outlive the next twelve hours."

Nevertheless, he sent for Mr. Wright, lest by any chance his own opinion might be wrong; but the old doctor pompously confirmed it, and so spread the news as he returned home, that every one in Clack knew that evening. And Mrs. Dale's maid told Mrs. Dale, when she carried her hot water into her room early next morning, how her old neighbour lay dying over the chemist's shop.

"Ay, but she won't die," said old Mrs. Clacker, "I heerd nobbut one bell toll;" and Crocodilla comforted Mr. Theodore much with this speech of the old lady's.

The surgeon never left the dower house all that night; all his interest was in one sick room,—all his professional skill was required in another. Mrs. Robert had ceased to talk after she was laid in bed, and began to breathe noisily. Theodore had crept back to her side, and once more was absorbed in watching her. Once during the night she spoke: it was to call upon Robin.

"I can't die without seeing him!" she exclaimed.

"He is sent for," Theodore said.

"Who are you?" she added.

"I am Theodore."

"Theodore,—who is he? I want my son Robin."

"O mother! I am your son, Theodore."

His passionate, imploring voice struck to her heart, so nearly dead as it was.

"Poor Theodore!" she sighed softly.

Then again the one great desire of his life overcame all sense of the fitness of the time, and found vent in words.

"Mother," he whispered, "only tell me who am I."

Brightness came back to her glaring eyes, the colour glowed up suddenly in her lips and cheeks, she opened her mouth and turned as if to speak; but she never spoke again. Guilty or innocent of the infamy that had blotted her honour, and deprived her child of a name, she carried her secret with her unspoken; unless the vehement protests she had never ceased to make against her calumniators during her life may be believed as truth.

For hours the unhappy young man bent over her, waiting for the words that never came; and the outcast son closed the weary eyes at last, and crossed the thin, fair hands on the silent breast, with the dreary feeling that he had lost the only relation he could claim in all the world.

She was free,—but death had freed her spirit as well as her body; and the two who had separated themselves in life, and by their own hands severed the tie they themselves had

made, were laid in the same grave on the same day.

Captain Robin travelled to Shrugg Park with his father's body, and for a time was much overcome to learn of his still further bereavement; but he did not think of his brother. There was so much to be done, so many orders to be given, so much writing to do, he had no time to remember that Theodore's loss was far greater than his own. Mr. Francis recalled this to him.

"Theodore must attend the funeral," he said.

"Why?" cried the captain; but with heightened colour he instantly added, "Oh, to be sure! Yes, of course."

"You will be the two chief mourners," continued Mr. Francis.

"No," said the captain angrily, "that is impossible; we should have to walk together. I shall walk alone."

"Think it over," said the other.

But when the captain had thought it over, he remained of the same mind; and Theodore was so utterly overpowered with grief that he never thought it odd when Mr. Shrugg said kindly,—

"You and I will follow Robin; he must go first, you know, as head of the family."

So Robin, in lonely state, followed the two coffins across the flagged pathway through the churchyard, where all Clack, having drawn its blinds and shut its shops out of respect for the dead, was congregated to view the procession as it passed to the entrance of the crypt where was the teeming family vault; and Theodore, stupefied with sorrow, clung to his cousin's arm in the rear.

Robin was very calm and soldier-like; the world had taught him to hide his feelings, and his profession had trained him to endurance. He stood listening to the beautiful words of the burial service, fully sensible of their beauty, and thinking sadly, but not passionately, of the

unconscious bodies boxed up before him. But the sweet, comforting words acted differently on the impulsive younger brother, and his sobs became uncontrollable. Then Robin showed his innate goodness: turning quietly round, he put his arm in Theodore's and drew him forward to his side,—and arm-in-arm, the brothers headed the return procession.

For that little act of charity Theodore was his brother's slave for life.

In hearing of Mrs. Robert's seizure and death, Mrs. Dale heard also of its effect on Susy, and she resolved to visit the dower house; declaring she didn't care whether she was received kindly or not, so that she might know the truth. She found Margaret and Nelly only in the sitting-room,—the former making mourning, the latter reading her French lesson. Mrs. Dale's greeting was as kindly as usual; and Margaret tried to seem perfectly at ease also.

"So awfully sudden,—such a pity dear Susan

was present," said the elder lady. "And will you let me send my maid over to help with your black; and I want Norah and Nelly to return with me to Dale."

"Thank you," said Margaret. "Only mamma and papa will go into mourning,—we are only very distantly related, you know. I will ask mamma about the children."

"And how shall you manage about the funeral?"

"Oh, poor Mrs. Shrugg was taken home last night. Captain Robin is to reach Shrugg to-night; he has telegraphed to ask papa to manage for both burials as soon as possible."

"I always said that poor woman would kill herself with passion," Mrs. Dale continued. "Did no one know her heart was affected?"

"No; she was very peculiar, you remember. Mr. Murkitroyd says her whole constitution was undermined. We are so thankful she wasn't seized when she was alone."

"Bless me! You are the most unsophisticated

people! I should have thought it an awful thing to happen in my house."

"We thought it very awful," Margaret said sadly; "but we were glad to see every remedy properly tried, and to feel sure all that could be done was done."

Margaret decidedly had the best of that embarrassing interview. It had the good effect of clearing away the coolness which was beginning between the old friends. Nelly's pale cheeks obliged her mother to accept the kindly invitation on the child's behalf, and Margaret's pride delighted in treating the enemy with generous forbearance. The perfect civility, shorn of all its old girlish affection, vexed and yet pleased Mrs. Dale. She admired the lady-like spirit; and when through the younger children she heard of her intention to leave home, she herself tried her utmost to find a situation where the girl would be treated as a friend, not as a dependant.

Every day too, came flowers, rare vegetables, all manner of dainties, from Dale for Susy;

and when Mrs. Shrugg tried to put a stop to such profusion, the tears came to Mrs. Dale's eyes, and she was so honestly hurt that it was impossible to refuse her generosity again.

Susy came back to her old place in the sitting-room, pale and weaker than ever, though the bright spring had begun, and all nature seemed invigorated by the delightful change.

Mr. Murkitroyd was there one beautiful morning, when she petitioned to have her sofa placed at the open window.

"If only I could go out," she said, "I think I should get well directly."

The longing in her voice, and the wistful look she cast over the garden, set the doctor thinking. On his way out he went into the little back room where, as he expected, Norah sat at the old desk, knitting her brows over books of chemistry.

"I believe you do more work than Johnson," he greeted her with, carefully shutting the door. "Can you keep the ledger yet?"

"It doesn't take much keeping," she said.

"How is that; isn't it a good business?"

She looked up at him, as if to see how much he knew.

"Do you think the profits could afford some expensive French machinery for your sister?" he continued.

"The profits!" Norah cried. "Had old Mr. Clacker ever any profits?"

"Ah!" cried he, shaking his head, "I knew all along your father would make a mess of it. I knew from the moment he gave up our custom for Edwards' sake, he'd never make money shop-keeping. A tradesman has no business with fine feelings."

"He's not a tradesman," Norah exclaimed. "None of us would like to take the bread out of other people's mouths, I should think."

"Pooh! But look here; if your sister could get some Parisian things that I know of, she might be able to get out; she'll never get strong till she can have fresh air. Couldn't the shop afford £50 for that?"

"Oh!" cried she, forgetting everything but her anxiety for Susan. "No. Papa owes more than that for drugs; but mamma has money of her own,—nearly a hundred a year; perhaps she could save half for Susy."

"That would be impossible," said he, gravely, horrified at this discovery of their destitution.

"Could *I* do anything?" Norah cried. "You can't think how often I think it is my fault that Susy is so ill; I would do anything to help her. If I ask you something, will you promise not to laugh?"

"I'm not going to laugh."

"Mr. Theodore says I have got on very well with chemistry, and he has taught me double entry in book-keeping too,—but you won't tell any one, will you? And he says in the large manufactories they are beginning to employ women; and you may know some one in Leeds who would take me to keep the books."

Mr. Murkitroyd went off into prolonged laughter; but Norah was in earnest, and his

ridicule hurt her deeply. She coloured crimson; and though she did her utmost to keep from crying, her eyes became wet. Mr. Murkitroyd succeeded in keeping his mirth under when he saw its effect; and he held out his hand to her, saying, penitently,—

"Look here, you're a good child, and I declare I honour and admire you; but, you know,—why, you are a child yet."

"No, I'm not," Norah said; "I shall be seventeen, next October."

"And this is only March," added he. "No, no; you must go on working at home yet a while; no one would employ a baby-face like you."

"I can't help being plain," cried Norah; "and you—"

"Holloa!" he exclaimed, "now you are fishing for compliments; but come now, I'll treat you as a woman, and show you I'm no longer laughing. Seriously, if your sister were rich, she could have much mechanical help to

make her state bearable, if not eventually to cure it. Couldn't Mrs. Seton—"

Norah hastily interrupted him. "Linda would help any of us in every way," she cried, "but papa and mamma will only allow her to give us little trifling presents on our birthdays, if Mr. Seton knows too; but nothing more would they accept."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"The captain might do something? He's got all."

"What Captain Robin! Why, papa wouldn't let Mr. Robert do anything; so I'm quite sure he wouldn't take from Captain Robin."

"Oh, I'll be hanged!" cried the doctor, rising and stamping his feet. "Well; look here"—He mused for a moment, and then added: "Don't repeat all this, there's a good girl; I'll try and think what can be done."

As he walked home he decided that a man might do worse than have six good daughters. "Poor child!" he continued, thinking of Norah.

"So she thinks she's ugly; I fancied all girls were conceited. I'm not sure she won't be as handsome as any of them, though, when she's filled out."

During the next few days, Mr. Murkitroyd kept his eyes and ears open. Above all, he managed to find out, partly through Johnson, partly through the other chemist whose trade had been so seriously imperilled by Mr. Shrugg's advent, that the tide of custom was entirely in favour of the latter. Here and there too, the surgeon, seemingly uninterested in everything but his patient, heard in his various visits amongst the Clackites how domestic expenses were being curtailed in the Shrugg's household; and how disappointed the Clack dressmaker had been, because the young ladies had made their mamma's mourning: signs and tokens he would never have noticed but for that talk with Norah.

Like most men who have no sisters, Mr. Murkitroyd had very chivalric notions of

womankind; and that ladies born and bred, like Mrs. Shrugg and her daughters, should have to suffer poverty and hardship, struck him very painfully. His views were almost radical in politics, and the chances are he would have had little pity had Miss Wright been obliged to retrench her personal expenses; but constant intercourse with the Shruggs had shown him they were free from fine lady arts and outside manners, and had served to exalt instead of abate his already high views.

He arrived very near the truth when his calculations brought him to the conviction that if the Shruggs had nothing to depend upon besides Mrs. Shrugg's slender annuity but what the shop brought in, they were in very sorry plight indeed; and were likely to want even proper food and clothing.

Meantime Linda had heard of the contrivance by which Susy might be much benefited, and had written off to tell her of it; and poor Susy knowing nothing of its expense,

asked the surgeon the very next time he called, if he knew of such a thing.

"Yes," he said; "he had thought of it before."

"Oh, why didn't you tell me," cried she; "only think if I could get about again. Does it cost much?"

"No-o-o," hesitated Mr. Murkitroyd; "it's a French contrivance. Shall I order one?"

"About how much does it cost, though?" Susy repeated.

"I can't say. A few pounds, perhaps."

"Oh!" she said, her voice unconsciously betraying her disappointment. "No, don't order it, thank you; I'll wait a little longer, and see whether summer doesn't cure me altogether."

The doctor professed to acquiesce.

Meantime Mr. Shrugg had been so engaged with Captain Robin's affairs, so unexpectedly brought into the very thick of the business consequent upon the double death, that his own anxieties had been for the time pushed

into the background; but with his wife and daughters, when the first shock of Mrs. Shrugg's terrible death was over, these were subjects of deep and all-absorbing interest; while their great endeavour was to prevent him knowing how keenly they felt their position,—and they succeeded. "Women can so easily adapt themselves to any circumstances," he thought. Indeed, do we not all too often look upon a loving woman's patience, endurance, and forbearance, as but negative virtues,—in familiar words, because "'Tis their nature to." At the same time, Mr. Francis Shrugg fully appreciated their reticence regarding his own culpability. No enemy could feel more bitterly on that point than he did.

CHAPTER. XV.

"WALKER!"

EVERYTHING Mrs. Robert Shrugg could dispose of was left to Robin. Of her daughter and of Theodore she made no mention in her will. Robin was her one care, and the money she was able to bequeath him was no less than fifteen thousand pounds sterling; so that independent of his succession to his father's property, the captain became master of a very tidy income.

Robin felt his parents' death sincerely, but he was young; and though it seems hard to say so, he was consoled for his loss by the gain to his own position in society. Formerly, he was counted as the heir, but as the estates were unentailed, there was just a possible, though a highly improbable, chance that he might find himself disinherited at the last; for

the Shruggs were a self-willed race, by no means placable and easy to be entreated; and one false step on Robin's part might have changed his future unalterably.

But now he reigned absolute,—a man by age, education, birth, and fortune; entitled to marry from the aristocracy, and to take his place if so minded amongst the magnates of the land; and even if he himself had been slow to recognise the good that had fallen to him, the world would soon have opened his eyes.

Mr. Francis Shrugg could not know all this and not feel a grudge against Dame Fortune.

He saw Shrugg Park overrun with workmen planting, building, ornamenting, re-furnishing; he saw shoals of coroneted, scented letters; friendly missives from dainty exclusives; kindly condolences from men whose words were golden; all for one young man strong to work, yet overloaded with riches; and he could not forbear, though he honestly tried, looking at the reverse of all this in himself,—worn with

trouble and poverty,—his shabby home,—his slighted daughters, his wife acting as an upper servant.

Day by day his white hairs multiplied, and his furrows deepened; and he could decide on no other way of overcoming further difficulties than by trying to sell the business and let the house; and with the money so gained, discharging his debts and settling in some still cheaper place, where, when Margaret and Bell were out in the world, their parents might strive to live on the mother's scanty income till some situation could be found suitable for Mr. Shrugg.

It was a miserable prospect, but the only one that appeared feasible; and Mr. Shrugg was at last persuaded to take steps to carry it out before his liabilities grew greater. He spoke to the doctor accordingly one day, putting on as much ease as he could summon: merely telling him he found shopkeeping was not his forte, and asking if Mr. Murkitroyd

knew any chemist who would buy the business and rent the house ?

The surgeon kept his gaze on the floor ; he evinced no surprise ; gave no opinion.

" Hum," he said. " You'd sell it all, I suppose,—house and all, I mean ?"

" No ; I don't want to give up every right to the old place."

" Hum," said the doctor again. " Clack isn't a tempting place for a go-ahead man of business ; but I'll inquire next time I'm at Leeds. Perhaps Edwards would be glad to get it all into his hands : why don't you sound him ?"

" He's a struggling man," said Mr. Shrugg.

" He could pay by instalments."

" Why, no,—" Mr. Shrugg answered, with evident reluctance. " I'd rather have it all done with before I leave. I should prefer the sum down."

" Quite right," said the surgeon ; and the little conference ended greatly to Mr. Shrugg's

delight, without having appeared to be other than the most natural proceeding.

Mr. Murkitroyd had business at Leeds only a day or two later, and was back at Clack again by the end of the week. He returned out of spirits; but the little quiet town, with its irregular houses resting among garden-trees just budding into tender spring buds, formed so pleasing a contrast to the noise and grime of the great manufacturing town, that insensibly he felt soothed. This last visit to his father had brought to a climax the old man's often repeated entreaties for his only child to settle at Leeds, and take his share of the business in which so much of his money was invested.

The son knew his proper place was by his father's side; not only did he owe that concession to a parent, but also his own fortune required his steady surveillance.

At his father's death,—supposing they remained friends,—the ex-doctor would be one of

the greatest mill-owners of that rich district. Everything therefore pointed to one course, and that was to give up all professional ties, and return to his original place at the desk without more delay.

"You know medicine was not your first choice," the old man said; and the son did know it.

"I am neither so clear nor so able as I was only a year ago," the father urged; and the son could not contradict him.

But the young man made no promise, except to think seriously; and came back to Clack, wondering how he was to leave it without learning whether Susy's heart would ever be healed, but more than half persuaded that every interest required his presence and uninterrupted attention at Leeds.

He ran up stairs, as had long been his wont, unannounced, into the Shruggs' sitting-room, to inquire after his patient.

"Oh, I'm so glad you've come back," she

cried, as he entered the room. "I want to go out before this delightful weather changes, and Mr. Wright wouldn't let me without your opinion."

"To go out!" cried he, thinking how exquisitely fragile and angelic she looked. "Pray, are you going to fly down stairs,—or drive a pair of doves in a balloon?"

"No, no," she cried; "but if two strong people,—such as papa and Sarah,—would carry me on the mattress out into the orchard, I should be content."

He looked out over the old-fashioned garden, flecked with sunlight; the apple-trees were already pink with blossom, and cast soft, lacey shadows over the daisied grass. It all lay sheltered and secluded in the very heart of the little town, like the spirit that yearned to enjoy it,—in the world, yet not of it.

"Doesn't it look lovely?" Susy added.

"Full of snails, I'll be bound," said he. "Why can't you enjoy it from here?"

"Oh!" cried Susy; "if you only knew how I want to go out once more! It may be very impatient and wicked, but I don't think it would do me any harm. I only ask for a quarter of an hour,—ten minutes."

How could he resist her? Beside, he knew professionally that the strong yearning of the sick is often a safe guide.

So Susy had her wish; and for one brief half-hour lay in the sweet air so long untasted, in a perfect delirium of delight.

This strong feeling pleased the doctor immensely. He argued from it that both mind and body must be healing; and for the first time for months he thought of Susy again as a woman to be won and worn, not a suffering victim to be adored afar off. His spirits were still more elated when he saw Mr. Shrugg, and told him he had,—by a mere chance, of course,—found a possible candidate for the business.

"But they offer very little," he added, noticing the poor gentleman's instantaneous bright-

ening in both look and voice. "This person won't go beyond five or six hundred pounds."

"Five or six hundred pounds!" Mr. Francis cried. "It is too much,—it is far more than it is worth. Ah! when he sees the books he won't repeat the offer."

"Why, it's dirt cheap!" answered the other; "dirt cheap, for any one who knows how to work it. I said I was sure you wouldn't let it go."

Norah was writing in a corner of the room, and she raised her head and looked keenly at the surgeon as he spoke.

"Oh dear!" cried her father, his countenance falling, "I would let it go. You see, I shall be glad to be free. I mean to get rid of what really doesn't suit me. Would it do for me to write to your friend, and explain?"

Mr. Murkitroyd avoided looking at Mr. Shrugg.

"No, no," he said; "of course I didn't positively decline,—merely said I thought the sum

ridiculously small. He's a beginner, but that's the very thing; he'd work it himself without having to pay an assistant. Why, dear me! the fellow will have his outlay back again in less than a couple of years at that rate."

Just then he caught Norah's eyes, and his own drooped before them.

"In fact," he added, hurriedly, "he himself runs no risk; his mother will advance the money."

"And perhaps she'll live here and keep house for him?" Mr. Shrugg exclaimed.

"Just so. Yes; I forgot the house. They wanted to know what rent. Of course I told them the sum paid down was merely for the stock and good will; I couldn't answer that."

"I thought £25," said Mr. Shrugg, "taken by the year."

"Well, that's too ridiculous," Mr. Murkitroyd cried. "You'll excuse me, but I should ask £40."

Mr. Shrugg laughed a happier laugh than

Norah had heard for long; and her eyes softened and brightened as she continued her steadfast watch.

"'Pon my word," Mr. Shrugg said, "I should have it on my conscience to take more than thirty. Well; is it to be considered an offer? Would he come over and see me?"

Mr. Murkitroyd was for the moment posed to reply; but his consciousness of Norah's gaze quickened his wits.

"No doubt," he said, after a scarcely noticeable pause; "but I explained everything. Dear me, uphill work does beginners good—steadies their minds, and develops their powers."

When Norah next saw the doctor alone, she said, abruptly,—

"What is the name of papa's tenant to be?"

"Miss Norah," he said, "you once trusted me with a secret,—can I trust you with one?"

"Yes, yes," she replied; "but I know beforehand: the name is,—*Walker!*"

Mr. Murkitroyd looked at her with undis-

guised admiration, and then burst out laughing.

"Shall we keep this secret together; or is it to be war to the knife?" he said presently.

To his intense surprise she began to cry.

"I understand it all," she sobbed; "but I know this will be such a boon,—for Susy's sake I can say nothing. But when I am older I will work day and night to pay you back."

Her genuine gratitude and deep feeling overcame him.

"Stuff," he said, gruffly, characteristically unwilling to be considered weak. "You'll find yourself mistaken. I'll send the real man over, and then I suppose you'll believe me."

And a young man did come from Leeds, and agreed to terms; and Mr. Shrugg was free to go whenever he chose to give up possession.

But Norah, and Margaret who shared the secret, remained convinced that Mr. Murkitroyd was the real purchaser. And Mr. Murkitroyd asked himself severely if he were not ashamed of such deceit and guile as he had involved

himself in? Alas, no! he felt only unwonted exhilaration of spirit.

Mr. Theodore, being a thorough Yorkshireman, might have suspected underhand work, when the new purchaser was so quickly hustled out of Clack that he was not permitted either to accept the invitation Mrs. Clacker hospitably sent him, nor even stop to be introduced to Mr. Theodore, when they met in the street; but Mr. Theodore was busy in a way that absorbed and delighted all his feelings in watching the progress of improvements at Shrugg, and in wandering about the estate unchecked,—nameless no longer since his brother's notice of him at the funeral; but "Mr. Shroogg," at last, "t' captain's broother sure enough," at least, in the eyes of all his humble friends. To be sure he felt sufficient interest to be curious as to the name, parentage, etc., of the new chemist elect; but the surgeon was at no loss for answers to his questions. As for Mr. and Mrs. Francis, they never for

an instant supposed all was otherwise than it seemed to be. Their great joy was their ability to get the French instruments for Susy, now the money was so soon to be theirs. Now the great question arose as to where they were to go, and how Susy was to be moved. That, the surgeon plainly said was an impossibility, unless she either became very much stronger, which was very unlikely, or that mechanical means were tried; and even they might fail; for now he was compelled to speak out, he added, her complete recovery was all but hopeless!

"Not quite hopeless?" cried her parents, catching at a straw. "Tell us the truth,—indeed it would be kindness!"

"Well, then," was the reply, "she may live to old age, crippled and almost as useless as she is at present, if she is carefully kept from exertion; but if the appliance you know of suits her, she may by its help even travel with ease. Could she command all the means obtainable,—

could she be skilfully watched, taken to certain baths in Germany; could she in fact have every whim indulged, every movement professionally treated, she might recover almost completely; but as she is not a princess, my good friends," and he spoke so kindly, poor Mrs. Shrugg's eyes filled with grateful tears, "you must be content to let time and moderate care work, and trust to higher power than ours to do the rest."

Then the father's remorse broke out in words and violent sobs.

"Oh, my poor darling,—and I am powerless!"

His wife went to him, and as she put her arm around his bowed neck, the doctor stole away. He went home, shut himself up, and so remained for some hours. He had a mad scheme in his head,—one that would involve him in trouble, anxiety, expense, annoyance, and might never give him the least compensation; but the time had come, when he could

no longer be reasonable; he was, as it were, two beings,—one sane, the other delirious: his sane self saw an impracticable, idealistic, romantic, folly; his delirious self saw a practicable, chivalrous, delirious career,—a career against suffering and sorrow,—a victorious career crowned with joy! Yet with his pulses leaping excitedly, his brain whirling, and his blood at fever heat, he wrote the following almost sober epistle to Mr. Shrugg.

"My dear Sir,—I wish to lay before you what may at first sight seem to be an extraordinary proposal; but which on mature consideration will, I trust, under the circumstances, meet with the approval I most earnestly desire. I stated to you and your good wife to-day, the remote chances and possibilities of alleviation for, and even ultimate recovery of, your eldest daughter, Miss Susan. At the time I spoke wholly professionally, and in accordance with the opinion of medical men of celebrity, of both London and Edinburgh, with whom

I have, as you know, corresponded on the subject ever since the lamentable accident occurred, and whose letters I shall be happy to lay before you, if you wish to see them. But I now wish to make known to you, what has hitherto been secretly and sacredly confined to my own breast,—my personal liking for your daughter, Susan, which induces me to allow no minor considerations to prevent my plain speaking. First, it is due to myself to assure you most solemnly that I was wholly ignorant of her previous engagement until my mind was unalterably fixed upon her. Since then, I believe no one can look back and say I have not honestly conducted myself towards her, both in my professional and private intercourse, simply as a friend; and I am convinced you will be no less surprised than herself to find I aspire to be more,—to be, in so many words, her husband. That her affections were deeply engaged, I am sure; that they are still with her dead lover, I can believe,—for she is not a

woman to love lightly, or forget quickly. But the very reason that gives me hope for her bodily recovery,—her youth,—gives hope to me also that time may soften her regret sufficiently to allow her to love again.

"Were she in sound health I should shrink from this premature avowal of my sentiments towards her: or where she rich and I poor I should try and live them down; but when I know how every month passing by with mere ordinary medical care over her must retard her progress materially, and how your position prevents you trying the best means of promoting her recovery, I feel that I have some excuse for urging what may at first sight appear inexcusable.

"As a husband only would the world sanction my close attendance upon her; and from a husband only could she accept the necessary outlay. I am as you know independent in every way. I should of course settle my fortune upon her, so that should I die before

my hopes are realized, she would still be able to carry out my scheme. I am perfectly aware that a marriage can be a mere matter of form at present; and I should like,—in the event of her entertaining this offer,—her mother or one of her sisters to accompany us abroad. My great desire is to benefit one for whom I have so very great a regard; and I must entreat of you in opening this matter to her, to induce her to look at it as I do, and as I trust you do also, in a rational light, as the best means of recovering the most precious possession,—that of health; and I will formally and solemnly bind myself to remain her faithful friend, without claiming dearer rights until it is her pleasure to bestow them. My fear of harming my patient by agitating her, were I to plead my own cause in person, and my dread of a hasty, adverse decision, determines me to beg that at least a week's consideration be granted before I receive her answer. I am going to stay at my father's for that time, and shall be back here by the end

of next week; but I should like a few words from you and your wife concerning this, if you will kindly favour me, before I start to-morrow morning."

This letter he signed and sealed, and it is a curious fact, that, after writing it, he could pay his customary visit to Susy; tell her, in his usual manner, he should be absent again for a few days, advise her professionally, and calmly bid her good-bye.

"Papa is going to write to Paris to-night," she said, as he rose to go. "I shall soon be able to run' races again with Nelly!" and she laughed joyously.

But as she struck her wasted hands together in gladness, the ring Willy Somers had given her slipped from the slender finger, and rolled away under the sofa.

Her face blushed up painfully as Mr. Murkitroyd stooped and recovered it; and she almost snatched it from him, as if his touch on it was profanation.

Luckily he was wholly unconscious whose gift it was, or he might have feared.

He placed his letter on Mr. Shrugg's table in the empty den, as he went out of the house; and late that night he received the following in Mrs. Shrugg's writing.

"My dear Friend,—

We make no comments upon the chance of the success of the noble proposal contained in your letter,—it must depend solely upon our poor dear girl's feelings; but we must tell you it has our sincere gratitude, and whatever happens, the recollection of it added to your many other great and handsome services rendered to us since we have had the honour and pleasure of your acquaintance, will ever render us your attached and deeply grateful friends,

"Francis and Susan Shrugg.

"P.S.—My husband is too much overcome to write coherently himself; but I am sure you will accept me as his amanuensis."

And with this comforting missive Mr. Murkitroyd set off to await the final verdict. His society was by no means enjoyable during this interval. Having no confidant, he could not relieve himself by giving utterance to his hopes and fears. His father received short, abrupt sentences, instead of the long, confidential plans the old man tried to draw forth; and as the time for his return to Clack drew close, the young man's common sense mood was uppermost, and he saw more of the risk and responsibility of the position in which he sought to place himself than he had before contemplated.

Up in London, where the season had set in, and the parks had commenced that matchless show of luxurious carriages and invaluable horses which draw admiring eyes even from the beauty they bear along, the young king of Shrugg, notwithstanding his deep mourning, was playing his part in the spectacle. How can royalty hide itself away from its loving subjects? How can sorrow shadow with

severity the youthful possessor of seven or eight thousand a year, whose previous experience of life has never brought aught but unalloyed contentment? He did try however to preserve some little retirement; nay, he even thought of overtaking John Dale and his party, and absenting himself entirely. But the cares of royalty must be attended to; and, in London, lawyers held the young man captive so many weary hours, that kind friends and even mere acquaintances insisted on the absolute necessity of such labours being lightened, lest his precious health should suffer.

He was often in Hyde Park Gardens,—there he felt at peace. That large drawing-room, with its sweet flowers and its graceful girlish occupants seemed to him the most home-like room in London. No one tried to make him flirt there,—no one flattered him for his position. He might sit at the piano, and whistle, or he might take up a paper and read, unrestrained. It amused him vastly

to be ordered peremptorily to be quick when Bell fancied herself busy; and he was at liberty to discuss his own plans at any length to Linda's kindly ears. Mr. Seton, with his experience of money matters, was no mean adviser. Mr. Seton had put himself and his family into becoming cousinly mourning,—not deep enough to exclude them from society, but just enough to let the world know Mrs. Seton's relationship to the lamented Yorkshire landowner, who had left his comfortable property in such good order; and Captain Robin had a general invitation to seek the city gentleman's counsel either at the office or at his home according to his will.

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CHAPTER XVI.

THE CAPTAIN HIT.

MR. SETON'S matrimonial views for his young sister-in-law had been compelled to change their course. "I wouldn't have believed it of Mowlam," he said confidentially to the captain. "He played fast and loose with that poor girl's feelings, and then deserted her for my sister,—a woman whose age and fortune ought to have made her spurn the idea of marriage!"

Which little speech was as confidentially repeated to "the poor girl" in question, who first flew into a rage at the notion, and then made such fun of it that Captain Robin hardly knew which to admire most,—her sparkling eyes in anger, or her rosy lips arched with extreme mirth.

But, for a long time, Captain Robin had no idea why Hyde Park Gardens seemed the nicest house in London.

Bell and Linda never spoke of their father's needy position to this rich young cousin,—never let fall a word to remind him of their great inequality of fortune. Bell's simple dress was always fresh and tasteful, such as money cannot improve; and it never struck him,—a luxurious bachelor,—to wonder how his poor cousin struggled on with so many daughters to clothe and feed.

To be sure, when he heard through his land agent at Shrugg of the contemplated change at Clack, the idea crossed his mind that his mother's cottage in The Park would be a nicer residence for ladies than Clack High Street afforded. But in the autumn he meant to fill Shrugg with bachelor friends for the shooting season, and to entertain liberally, with a view to future election for Parliament; and a batch of pretty girls close by might

prove inconvenient, so this thought was abandoned as soon as entertained. He remembered to ask for an explanation of this move; and Bell simply said the truth,—her father wasn't experienced, and couldn't make the business pay.

"Why didn't Miss Margaret marry Dale?" he asked next.

"Who told you about it?" Bell rejoined.

"Seymour's mother. Mrs. Dale told her the reason of that Egyptian plan, but didn't mention names. But I saw enough when I was at Dale's, you know, to piece the puzzle all right now. I suppose the blue and red bottles annoyed papa and mamma, eh? But I didn't think Master John would have been so obedient. I was nearly in love with her myself once!"

"It was Margaret!" cried Bell eagerly. "You know how proud she is; of course she wouldn't have him against Mr. and Mrs. Dale's wishes."

"Well; I suppose she didn't care two-pence?"

"Oh, didn't she! Norah says she's awfully cut up. Only fancy,—she's going out as a governess!"

"Oh, no," cried the captain; "that's a shame! The idea of handsome Margaret teaching noisy brats!"

"Well," Bell continued, forgetting her usual prudence on all domestic topics, "it will be a great help to papa, you know. I shall be a governess, too."

"You!" said the captain. "Mrs. Seton, is it true?"

"She says so," Linda said sadly.

"Why can't she stay here always?" Captain Robin added, looking very grave. "You two never fight, do you?"

Linda's cheeks grew very pink. Bell put up her hand.

"There's no knowing what we might do," she said, with a laugh. By-and-by, when

Linda's attention was turned away, she added to him, "Please don't say anything of that sort again. You forget Linda is married."

"Well; but Seton is immensely rich," he answered, "and he seems very fond of you."

"He's very kind, very," Bell said; "but,—oh, you are unmarried, and, of course, you can't understand."

"And you, of course, do understand?"

"No; but don't you see—Oh! I can't explain," she cried.

"And pray, when do you intend to begin your tournament against youth and toffee."

"I shan't talk to you, if you can't talk sense."

"My dear child,—"

"I'm not your dear child, nor any one's dear child."

Captain Robin stroked his blonde moustache. He did not admire the young lady's anger so much when he was the object of it.

"Don't be cross," he said submissively. "But look here,—you and Margaret are not fit

to fight the world. I know what governesses are: they are snubbed by every one, if they are ladies; and if they are not, they are used as mere servants. You, being ladies, will be snubbed. How will you and Miss Margaret bear that?"

"I don't think people are so bad as all that. I dare say governesses often look out for slights when none are intended; and when they don't get treated with respect, very often it is because they are themselves wanting in self-respect."

"Well, there's something in that; but, do you honestly like the idea?"

She shook her head. "Do you know," she laughed,—all her good humour restored,—"if it wasn't *infra dig.*, I'd rather be a young person in a shop to try on bonnets and cloaks,—it must be such fun strutting about in perpetual new things; and I'd like measuring out ribbons and laces, only I couldn't add up the bills; I never could make them right."

"Then how do you mean to teach arithmetic?"

"Oh, I shall get a key, you know, and learn it all the night before. Of course I shall make my pupils think I am a female Colenso."

But the captain looked very doubting.

"What will your pay be?" he asked.

"Oh, I don't know. I shall try for fifty or sixty."

"Why, that won't keep you in gloves; it wouldn't me."

"Oh, won't it? I mean to give up at least half of it, of course."

"Do you mean to say," he continued, "you could dress on fifty pounds a year? I'm really not asking out of mere curiosity."

"I mean to say I should be ashamed to spend so much on mere dress."

He looked at her with intense amazement, and shook his head slowly.

"You'll be astonished when your bills come in," he cried; "money goes so fast, you know."

"I don't mean to have any bills," said she.

"O cousin Bell! you'll never be bothered to pay at the time for everything you get! But you won't go yet?"

"Yes; I'm going home next week."

Captain Shrugg was engaged to a very select party that night; he had been looking forward to it as a more than usually pleasant prospect, but somehow it seemed uninteresting and flat; he slept badly too, and dreamed foolish dreams about Bell in trouble and danger; and he was unable to move to her aid. Two or three days passed, and still this unquiet mood was upon him; at last he acknowledged the cause. "I'm hit," he said to himself; "now what's to be done?" What should he do,—he was rich, and his own master; he had no one's wishes to consider but his own; he could afford to despise the world's opinion.

Bell was a Shrugg, a fitting wife for him in point of family. If he married her, he would have a right to assist her father. How many

men he himself knew who portioned their wives' relations; and Bell's relations were already his.

It was no uncommon case for the fortunate head of a family to support less fortunate members of it. Mr. Francis Shrugg had refused the proffered assistance of the father; but he would surely allow his daughter's husband to help him to keep that daughter's sisters in a position more suitable to them?

Captain Robin could not answer his own question; indeed he knew not what he should do. He thought over everything except the possibility of Bell refusing him; that possibility never crossed his mind. Too many mammas and papas had courted him, too many young ladies had smiled on him, for his mind to be disturbed on that score. As Prince of Wales he had received too much adulation to make him doubtful when King in possession. No; he firmly believed all rested on himself, and he could not easily decide for himself.

Luckily for Bell, she knew nothing of all

this. She saw Mr. and Mrs. Frederick Lington driving in the park, and she told Linda a repetition of that sight would kill her; and tender-hearted Linda believed her, and kept under her own sorrow at the idea of being again alone in her grand house. And as at that time, Mrs. Shrugg had written to tell them of the excellent terms their father had made with his new tenant, Bell had less scruple about returning home to be an additional burden, and it was decided she should go at once.

Mr. Polkely Seton expressed himself quite grieved to lose his young friend; but he was evidently quite glad to have his wife to himself again.

"I beg you'll ask her to accept this little present," he said to Linda; "young ladies always like to take presents home." And he gave her thirty pounds.

Bell's blighted heart grew very light at this sight; but true to the family principles, she was for giving the money back again.

"I have enjoyed myself so much," she said; "you have been so kind already. I don't like taking all."

Mr. Seton was delighted with her. How many years had he lived without affection and gratitude, spoken or unspoken! He began to feel ashamed he had not offered her more, and gallantly told her so, as he asked her "to favour him by accepting it without more words."

I am sure Bell's heart was not in the slightest degree blighted when she thought of the treasure she had to carry home with her. Thirty pounds in her box! She could think of nothing else,—not even that she had left Linda in tears, or that Robin Shrugg would be surprised not to see her when he next came to the Setons.

Linda's heart, too, was touched by this kindly offering,—she did her best to hide away her sorrow, and exerted herself to talk about something that would interest her husband. And he in return did his best to make the

evening seem less dull; he gave up the usual practice after dinner, and instead of it he read her a long article on parliamentary reform from the "Quarterly." Alas! it had a different effect to what was intended; for when at the end of an hour's monotonous dissertation on subjects far removed from a young woman's tastes, he turned to take breath, and to inquire how far her opinions coincided with the writer's, he saw her long eyelashes resting calmly on the round flushed cheeks, and the slightly open mouth emitting faint but unmistakable sounds of deep and healthy sleep.

The picture was too pretty to be resented.

Captain Robin was hardly sorry to find his cousin had left London. It would be best for him to have more time before he quite decided; he would wait at least till she heard of a situation, then he could come forward and raise her to his own level. He did not think himself selfish, only prudent.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE FORFEITED HOME.

Susy knew nothing of Mr. Murkitroyd's letter to her parents, till the next day; but Margaret read it in the evening, and they all decided Susy should be allowed a good night's rest before being agitated by the disclosure. It was from her mother she at length heard the amazing offer, and Susy was honestly amazed. In her innermost heart she had always looked upon him as a rough diamond, as unlikely to be the author of such a chivalrous, delicate scheme as any man alive,—and until she had herself read his letter she could not realize it; but its effect on her was very different to what her parents and Margaret expected. To be sure she flushed at his allusion to her constancy, and exclaimed admiringly at his proposed generosity, but the dominant effect was surprise.

That an acceptance could be even considered, that any woman could marry a man on such terms,—seemed an idea outside the pale of probability.

"He is a noble-hearted man," said Mrs. Shrugg.

"Indeed he is," Susy answered, decidedly. "But mamma, how very queer of him! I never heard of such a thing; did you?"

"It proves his sincere, disinterested affection," said her mother.

"He is the last man in the world I should have suspected of romance," Susy added; "we always thought him a confirmed old bachelor. Don't you remember how he always became sarcastic when sentiment was mentioned? Yet all that time,"—and here she blushed and broke off.

"I don't quite think with you," her mother said. "I'm sure his tenderness in times of sickness has always been wonderful. He always laughed at Mr. Theodore's sentimental non-

sense,—who could help doing so? But look at his kindness to old Mrs. Clacker, and—"

"O mamma! don't talk as if I didn't appreciate him; of course I can never forget what he has been to me."

"Well, love, I only want you fully to understand the case. It is as you say an unusual one,—he also sees it to be so; but then, remember the peculiarity of your position. In plain words, it is neither more nor less than life he offers you: for life without health can hardly be called life; can it?"

"No," said Susy; "but you forget, mamma. I should have to perjure myself to swear to love, honour, and obey. How could I do that?"

"Ah, Susy, darling, you could not help honouring such a man?"

"No; but love, mamma. Perhaps it is very wicked to say so, but I am afraid I should end by hating him." She was very grave now, and the mother saw she had better be left to think the matter over in quiet.

To Margaret, Susy began the subject of her own accord.

"Margaret, can it be possible mamma thinks I could marry him?"

"I don't know."

"Would you?"

"I! O Susy, you forget!"

"But mamma must forget William?"

"No, she doesn't. But don't you see,—mamma has forgotten what she felt at our age; I dare say she fancies if you could but get quite well again, you would be quite happy. You know, of course, girls do love again. Scarcely any one ever marries their first love; do they?"

"But not so soon after?"

"But, don't you see, Mr. Murkitroyd excuses himself for speaking so soon on account of delay in your case being dangerous."

"Margaret," Susy said, reproachfully; "you are talking not what you think, but what you have been told to say!"

Margaret looked indignant.

"Don't take such nonsense into your head," she said. "Didn't mamma tell you the answer she gave him,—that all must depend upon your own feelings? I only say what every one would say,—if you value health, marry him; he knows, and himself proposes, the conditions. If poor William could speak to you, he would say as I say,—it is every one's duty to use all lawful means to remove suffering. If papa could afford to do the best that can be done, it would be different; then the doctor would be silent longer."

"You couldn't follow your advice?" Susy urged.

"Yes," said Margaret, "I am following it. I would much rather stay quietly at home, but I know if I go out and work hard, I shall feel less."

"Ah! but," poor Susy cried, "it is so different for you. John Dale is alive,—all may end well; but William is dead, and can never come back to me—never. I can only die and go to him!"

She had never given way so much before,—never put her sorrow into passionate words as now; and Margaret was astonished and conscience-stricken at having called forth so much anguish; she put her arm under her sister's head, and kissed the weary face.

"Susy, dear," she whispered, "sometimes I have envied you; for you know the worst, and suspense is very hard to bear. And remember William is happy for ever; for though he may see your trouble, yet he sees also the reason and the end, and can appreciate the design. I have thought lately,—since I have cared so much for any one,—that poor little Linda is more to be pitied than either of us, and she has never complained."

"But then she never cared for another?"

"No; but she can't be happy."

"Mamma," said Susy, the next time they were together alone, "tell me the truth; do you think I or any woman ought to marry merely for convenience?"

"My poor darling," Mrs. Shrugg exclaimed, "all my ideas are changed now from what they were. Poverty used to have no fears for me; but now it seems a terrible calamity. You may think me calculating and hard; but, dear love, you cannot realize what it is to see one's children thrown upon the world, and to be unable to keep them. It is hard enough for one to be estranged from me; but Linda will soon form other ties and be happy. But look at Margaret and Bell, —how can they endure slights? And you, my poor child, what can you do when we are gone from earth!"

"I have been thinking," said Susy, gently stroking her mother's hand, "of that spinal hospital we used to subscribe to. I would go there thankfully, dear."

"I understand what you feel at the idea of marrying just yet," her mother answered; "but by-and-by you may be sorry we did not sufficiently impress on you the full desirability of Mr. Murkitroyd's request. But I could not

consent to your leaving me to go amongst strangers in a hospital. Thank God, we are not so poor as all that yet."

Day by day Susy followed up the subject. Mr. Shrugg was persuaded to write to some friends for particulars of election, etc.; and little by little father and mother accepted the view Susy took of her unexpected offer.

Susy was the paramount consideration. That she should not marry, was an understood thing long before Mr. Murkitroyd's hours of leave were over; but that she should go to a hospital was a much more difficult question to answer.

Susy's sweet temper, her fair soft beauty, her quiet graceful manners were perfection in her mother's eyes; and her father, though he called Margaret "his handsome daughter," *par excellence*, and delighted in Norah's shrewd retorts and daring temper, yet thought of his eldest born as the one needing most love and tenderness. So both parents easily believed

her verdict to be the right one; and having done their duty in setting forth all the advantages she was refusing, they ceased to argue the matter.

Norah was not supposed to know what was going on; but notwithstanding her self-imposed studies, and grand schemes for her own fortune, she had eyes and ears open; and though her parents forebore to discuss the subject in her presence, Margaret confidentially imparted it to her. Margaret had admitted her younger sister to greater intimacy lately. The latter's absurd egotism and high flights of imagination amused the elder girl, and distracted her sad thoughts.

In Norah's opinion Susy was very wrong in refusing.

"I should like to marry a man like that," she said; "he is so upright and downstraight, as Miss Crocky says; and I should so like to be the mistress of a big mill. I'd look after the girls, and have a school, and teach them to

cook and to mend. Only think, Margaret, what a delightful life to superintend everybody and do no end of good."

"Oh yes!" cried Margaret; "to be head of everything, and subject to none. I don't think Mr. Murkitroyd would stand that."

"Poor fellow!" Norah cried, when the doctor came back to Clack, and she heard him go into her father's room. "I can't stay in the house while he is receiving his death-blow. I shall go and see the old lady next door."

"What! 'eve yer run away from t' doctor?" Mrs. Clacker exclaimed, as she entered the little sitting-room. "Crocky knocked at t' winder for him to come in; but he were bent on going on. I wish one of you young ladies would take a fancy to him."

"Lor', mother!" Crocodilla said, rebukingly; "the gentleman must speak first, you know."

Norah was longing to tell her all she knew, but prudently restrained herself.

"We'd all speak fast enough," Mr. Theo-

dore said, "but having's another *chose, n'est-ce pas, mademoiselle?*"

"Oh dear, dear!" said Miss Crocky, admiringly, "he is such a languagist; isn't he, Miss Norah? I tell him he's thrown away here. His place is at courts, I'm sure."

"But really," Mr. Theodore continued, after kissing his hand in return for the compliment, "I begin to be suspicious of all these little journeys to Leeds. Depend upon it there's a fair lady in the case."

"What case?" cried Mr. Murkitroyd, himself appearing.

"Well, old lady,—well, young ladies,—how are you all? Theodore, I salute you."

"Same to you, sir," said Mr. Theodore. "Well, I'll tell you the case in point. I'm telling my fair and venerable and honoured audience, I fear we are going to lose you."

The doctor gave one rapid glance at Norah.

"How do you mean?" he said.

"All these little journeys, eh?" cried Mr.

Theodore. "Ah, ah! my respected sir. Come, tell us; is she a fair Leedsite, with hundreds of 'hands' at her disposal?"

"Oh dear, dear! Hundreds of hands—did one ever hear the like?" Miss Crocky exclaimed. "Do send that to the paper, sir,—it is so clever."

"Don't flatter him, Miss Crocky," said the doctor. "You really mustn't encourage him, or he'll grow soft. No, Theodore, I despise your insinuations."

"Eh, deary!" Mr. Theodore exclaimed, "we shall see. They're getting on famously, sir."

"Who? what?"

"With the improvements at Shrugg," the little man replied, with dignity. "Any day you like, I'll go over with you."

"Have you had yer dinner?" cried the old lady. "Where's your manners, Crocky; never to think of a bite or a sup?"

"I won't have anything," said the doctor; "no, not if the house was teeming with good

things. Gracious me! one's digestion must have rest sometimes. But, Theodore, you are right one way; I am thinking of settling at Leeds."

"There, now!" Miss Crocky exclaimed. "There, now! isn't the rest coming off? Do tell us, sir."

"No," he answered; "Wright must stir himself, and get my substitute at once. My father can't do without me,—or the business can't. Anyhow, I must be off; at least, next week."

"Sir," said Mr. Theodore, rising to the occasion, "you will carry away with you the regard, esteem, and good-will of all your grateful patients and friends."

"Indeed he will," sobbed poor Crocky, more affected by the beauty than the sentiment of the speech.

"I hope you'll get all your bills in first," said the old lady; "some o' t' people are bad payers, here. Crocky, you must make him a

cake to eat on t' way,—it's a long drive, fasting."

"Are you going my way?" said the doctor, rising, to Norah.

And they left the house together.

Norah was very nervous, and she showed it. That he could come straight out from such an interview as that he had had with her father, and joke with these people, perplexed her greatly; and no doubt he guessed her feelings.

"You are wondering at me?" he said, gravely, as they turned out of the street into the country lane leading to the back gate. "You know all, don't you?"

"Yes," said Norah, her speech failing her for once.

"I wonder at myself," he added. "I hoped to have been your brother,—but it is not to be. I must bear it like a man. Are you sorry for me?"

"Very," Norah cried, energetically; and she put her hand in his, as it swung by his side,

as a child would do. "I wish so much Susy could think of you as *I* do. But you are not angry with her?"

"Angry! No; I esteem her higher than ever. She is acting nobly. She has clearer and better ideas of marriage than I had. But I can't stay at Clack."

They had reached the garden door, and Norah stopped at it, still holding his hand.

"You won't give us up," she said. "You will remember your promise, when I am old enough, to help me to a situation. Shall you write to papa sometimes?"

"Of course," he said; "and I shall always remember you, my good little friend, and be glad to be of any use to you."

"Good-bye," she said. "We shall miss you so much."

He looked back after walking to the end of the lane, and saw she was still watching him.

"She's a warm hearted child," he said to himself. "God bless her!"

So ended Mr. Murkitroyd's chivalrous design. He left Clack without seeing Susy again, and at once began a new life in his father's counting-house.

Margaret received two or three letters from John Dale before he reached Alexandria. Her father knew of them, but made no attempt to see them. "I can't allow you to correspond," he said; and Margaret acquiesced in his decree, though these letters seemed to brighten her existence; and she honourably assured her lover she could not answer another. Yet, when he took her at her word, and wrote no more, her high spirits drooped, and she exerted herself more than ever to get a situation as governess.

In due time the mechanical support arrived at Clack. Bell's thirty pounds went towards paying for it; and proud was Bell thus to bestow her present.

"I'd have given five or ten years of my life to have been able to pay," said poor Norah. "O Bell, you lucky girl!"

"Oh," said Bell, "what is money to me!" which much meaning remark excited Norah's curiosity so much, that by degrees she wormed the secret of Bell's disappointment from her.

"Well," was the younger girl's comment upon it; "I would have fixed on some one better than that coxcomb, Fred Lington. You ought to be very thankful you escaped marrying him. It seems to me every one falls in love with the wrong person. There's poor Susy,—and Margaret,—and now you! Won't I take care never to fancy any one, that's all."

Susy was at first only a little benefited. To be sure, it enabled her to sit in a chair, which was a blessed change for her; and it was expected to become of still greater service as she became more expert in using it. In a month's time they hoped to be able to move her from Clack; for now Mr. Shrugg had the five hundred pounds for the business promised, he was able to plan their removal without immediate dread of want of means to carry his plan

out. Mr. Murkitroyd was to manage the transfer of the shop, etc., for his young friend. The ex-doctor thought Mr. Shrugg would like this arrangement best.

"So thoughtful and nice of him," Mrs. Shrugg said. "In his hands everything will be properly settled, for papa would be sure to be too generous."

Mr. Murkitroyd also took a lively interest in the working of the French support; he expressed himself altogether professionally respecting Susy, and it was sometimes difficult to remember he had ever written so very differently about her. He also advocated Susy's scheme of trying to enter as a patient at the hospital for spinal complaints.

"It was a most sensible and likely plan," he wrote. "Then Miss Susy would have constant care, and all the known appliances for relief, at her command. If all such cases could be treated at these hospitals recovery would be much more frequent."

Gradually Mr. and Mrs. Francis Shrugg learned to look upon the proposed dispersion of their children as facts to be realised; but they dallied over the break up, as children dally over a dreaded "must be."

Meantime Mrs. Dale came in and out almost as often as formerly. Margaret seldom saw her; they two could not renew their former familiarity, while both resented so bitterly in their hearts the other's apparent deceit. When they did meet they were civil,—nothing more.

Not so with the squire: he could not disguise his feelings. When he met Diana, he would flush like a young woman; and their hands had never met since Diana's last visit to the Hall.

But these meetings were very rare, for the squire was much from home; and early in June Mrs. Dale also left to accompany him for their annual month's trip to London.

June already! And yet no change in the old dower house. In another month, the election by which Susy hoped to be admitted into the

hospital was to take place, and then Mrs. Shrugg thought they might as well all move south together. In another month Margaret was to go and stay with Mrs. Sims, for the suitable situation had not yet offered itself; and Margaret thought her chance of obtaining one would be better, were she in London.

Mr. and Mrs. Polkely Seton had gone abroad. Mr. Seton could not sufficiently forgive his sister; therefore, as the only way of avoiding attending her marriage, he professed solicitude of his wife's health, got a fashionable doctor to recommend the iron waters at Swalbach, and took her off before the dreaded ceremony took place.

Luckily, Bell knew the real motive for this move, and thus additional anxiety was spared at home.

"It is the month of roses," sang Bell, coming upstairs with a nosegay of summer flowers; and she sang as blithely as if her life was very bright to her. She had kept up the fiction of

her blighted heart so long, that it had worn itself out; and only when she was not well did she remember her false admirer. Bell was like a June rose herself as she entered the sitting-room,—that pleasant, spacious room, with its open windows, its scent of summer flowers, its home-like, sunny aspect. Starry jasmine chinked into, and framed the bow window that overlooked the street,—and Clack High Street, was no disagreeable view in summer time, when roses and pear-trees hid the discoloured brick-work of its houses; while from the other side overlooking the garden one could see every kind of old-fashioned plant and shrub growing in profuse luxuriance amidst vegetables and fruit-trees. It was not a fashionable look out on either side. But Bell called it all "lovely;" and Susy mentally wondered how she was to leave it for a hospital ward.

"Cousin Robin!" cried Bell, stopping in her song, as she saw the unexpected sight of the young captain seated by Susy.

"Cousin Bell!" cried he, mimicking her surprise. "The time of roses, is it? I thought only thorns were flourishing yet, till you appeared."

Bell curtseyed with mock respect. "I should hope Susy is flattered," she cried. "But now you are in these wilds, you should leave off fine speeches,—they are not natural to you. Pray what makes you leave the gay metropolis, Captain Shrugg of Shrugg?"

"She's incorrigible!" Captain Robin said, turning to Margaret.

But Bell was not to be so put down. "Oh, I know now," she added. "Mr. Seton has left, and you couldn't bear London without him."

"Oh, ah!" Captain Robin said; "to be sure Seton was a great loss, but Clack would have been as good as Germany for Mrs. Seton, judging from certain complexions I have seen lately. Yes; no doubt it is the time of roses, Cousin Bell. I want you all to come and look at my garden at Shrugg."

This want had only arisen since Bell's entrance.

"Oh, I should like it!" Bell answered. "Wouldn't it be nice, Margaret. And some afternoon you'd give us tea with thick cream in it, out in the garden?"

"Bilious stuff!" said the captain. "No; I want you all to come to luncheon and dinner and everything. Cousin Susy, I'll send my mother's phaeton for you. I say, you might have it whenever you like; it's never used, you know."

"*I* don't want it, so you may have it," laughed Bell. "Susy, I hope you are flattered again."

Captain Robin coloured. Bell was immediately sorry for her ungracious speech, and she quickly added,—

"Cousin Robin, I beg your pardon; but I have been taking cowslip wine, and perhaps it got into my head."

"Give me a rose," he said; "and we'll cry quits."

Since Mrs. Shrugg's death none of the Clack family had been at Shrugg Park, nor had they ever been inside the great house. Mr. Francis could not revisit it as a stranger, nor would he allow his daughters. But now times were altered,—his rival in his grandfather's affections was dead,—that rival's son was his friend; at his invitation Mr. Shrugg was not unwilling to see the old place again, especially as he was about to leave the neighbourhood, in all probability never to revisit it.

All his children too had always eagerly desired to see the place that "Papa might have had for his own." With them pleasures were few now; and to refuse this was more than the poor father could do.

Mr. Theodore sighed when Norah ran in to tell Miss Crocky of their projected day at Shrugg.

"I heard the squire had arrived," he said; "but I don't like to go and pay my respects

without some encouragement. He's only come for a day or two?"

"No," Norah said; "only to give some new directions about the flower-garden."

"If you could just manage to mention me incidentally," added the little man. "I should be glad to know how he regards me, you know."

"His grandfather would a' comed to see me," cried the old lady; "but I reckon t' young squire thinks I'm dead long ago. Well, so I ought to be."

"Nay, nay, mother, love!" Crocky exclaimed.

"Ay; but it's Ay, ay," muttered Mrs. Clacker. "T' hearse must have broken down, Crocky, or it would a' been here a good while ago."

Crocky shook her head, and whispered, "Mother's rather down to day; she was put out this morning because t' tea cakes run short."

Mr. Theodore waved his hand. "Miss Clacker," he exclaimed, "we must not sadden

the unwrinkled brow of our fair young visitor, by gloomy conversation. Miss Norah, how do the *belles lettres* progress?"

"Do you mean my studies in chemistry?"

"In vulgar parlance, yes."

"Lor'!" cried Miss Crocky; "I'm sure Miss Norah's language is always etiquettical, sir."

Mr. Theodore smiled indulgently. "Figure of speech,—mere figure of speech!" he cried. "Vulgar parlance merely means every-day expressions. Now *I* like to ornament grammar: rhetoric is my most pleasing forte."

"You promised me a solution to that puzzling question on ether," Norah said,—too much accustomed to his flights of folly to heed them.

"I did, but I can't find my notes. The original was in your great grandfather's writing. No doubt it's in the little escritoire in the back room."

"Oh, then I can't get it, for papa won't let us touch those papers; he likes them to remain just as the old man tied them up."

"Well, I'm sure I'd have a look if I was your papa," Crocodilla said. "There might be some bank notes hid amongst them. When poor father died, we found a five pound note tied between the Bible and its cover; and mother came upon two or three one pound notes that had been hid away till they were useless."

Norah laughed. "I should like to look for that paper of grandpapa's," she said; "but I know I must not. I don't suppose he hid his money away, though."

"Dear old gentleman!" and Miss Crocodilla heaved a sigh to his memory.

"*I* don't think so," was Norah's retort.

Captain Shrugg prepared to receive his poor relations with all the luxury his yet limited household afforded. He did not ask himself why he was so suddenly solicitous to do them honour; and a desire to display his possessions was furthest from his mind. No, he had come to Clack simply on business, as

he stated; but it was the sight of Bell with her rose-leaf face, and the sound of her clear young voice rising so joyously amidst so much poverty, that forced him to desire to see more of her, without considering whither this increasing fancy would lead him. Captain Robin had heard of course, years ago, how much nearer his father's cousin had been to the possession of Shrugg than his father; but time had dimmed the story, and the young man had almost forgotten it. Thus he could welcome Mr. Francis without a shadow of constraint, or a suspicion of the pang felt by the disinherited when he found himself but as a guest in his former home.

To all the others the visit was one of unalloyed pleasure. Susy had come at a foot's pace in the low, easy phaeton, and had suffered no inconvenience. And when she lay on the lawn, with golden laburnums, and chestnut trees in full flower; and silver birch-trees, copper beeches, feathery acacias, giant

oaks and elms just breaking out into freshest verdure around her; with the scent of lilacs and violets and cowslips on the soft summer breeze; and an uninterrupted view over the park, and over meadows yellow with buttercups, and dappled with sweet cuckoo flowers and daisies; over gleaming streams like burnished ribbons; over hamlets with dark square church towers; over hill and dale, coppice and furrowed fields,—it seemed to Susy that life was worth a struggle, and her young spirit rose once more, glad of its existence. Gloomy thoughts were for that day set aside. She thought not of William, struggling with dark swollen waters, nor lying in an uncared-for grave; but as radiant with immortality, in brighter and fairer scenes than she could picture. Was he not better off than she,—poor, crippled, and useless? Such a luxurious home as this could make life endurable, even to her; but she checked the envious feeling as it arose, ashamed of its discontent.

The house at Shrugg stood half way up a gently rising hill. It was of no particular style of architecture: a solid family mansion, such as may be seen all over England, standing on smooth lawns, with sheltering woods behind. A house with large, lofty, cheerful rooms, free from dark stories, draughts, and rats; needing much furniture and company, according to the young people's ideas; but to Mr. Shrugg, alive with the memories, of pleasant friends and delightful, youthful days.

They went all over it,—exclaiming at faded ladies'-work in the drawing-room, and at hideous silhouettes still hanging in the old squire's dressing-room,—Captain Robin telling of his contemplated changes, and his cousins suggesting others. In a room on the top storey was a frameless oil painting, turned against the wall, representing a boy with long curls, dressed in an old-fashioned frock of red velvet.

"Oh! isn't it like Norah?" Bell cried.

Her father surveyed it with a compassionate smile.

"I was very proud of that frock," he said. "So the old man discarded even that portrait!"

"I'd no idea it was you," Captain Shrugg exclaimed. "I'll send it to you to-morrow."

"There's another somewhere," Mr. Francis said, "taken in academicals: perhaps that's burnt!"

"No, it's not," the captain said. "It's in one of the side-rooms on this floor. Parson Bill we nick-named it when we were children, not having an idea who it was. Then, is that your likeness in yeomanry uniform in the blue room?"

"No; that was my father. The old man kept it in his bedroom."

To the blue room they all went, but the picture had been taken down to make way for workpeople, and had to be dislodged from under a pile of other portraits of almost forgotten Shruggs. The unfortunate young heir

smiled from the canvas on his disinherited son. No wonder his early death had shadowed the old squire's life, and broken the poor young widow's heart. It was a gay, handsome face, sparkling with happiness and perfect health.

Captain Robert insisted on considering this also to be Mr. Shrugg's property.

"You see we have had good looks on our side once, Cousin Bell," he cried.

"That's the exception to prove the rule," she retorted; but Bell smiled brightly on her host, thinking he was very kind to give himself so much trouble to entertain so many of them.

It was very delightful to saunter over the short grass under the shade of the trees, to visit the cool dairy with its old-fashioned Dutch tiles, then on to the paved stable-yard, with its running stream of bright spring water, its huge empty carriage-houses, and long rows of airy horse-boxes.

"My father got the old squire to build all these," Mr. Francis said. "They were only just

begun when he was killed; but the old man carried out the plans, though he never cared for horseflesh."

Then they entered the high-walled vegetable gardens, where the blossoms had already hardened into profuse promise of rich wall-fruit for the autumn. Norah and Nelly exchanged whispers of intense admiration when they beheld acres of strawberries, gooseberries, raspberries, and currants; but nothing was yet ripe so far north but cherries, and Captain Robin swung himself up into a cherry-tree, and showered the red fruit down on them.

While the day lasted, the young man believed he cared for nothing but rural pleasures; life passed in these gardens with Bell at his side presented a life of bliss. But alas! he did not speak and secure the prize he coveted, till he could no longer treat as sovereign prince; and then 'how' bitterly he rued his selfish delay.'

Never before had he tasted the sweetness of conferring kindness so strongly as when he

stood that evening, watching his retreating guests. Kindly eyes and cordial hands had more than repaid him for his welcome; and the girlish voices came floating back again and again on the still evening air, bidding him good-bye. He stood long at the gate, listening till all sound of hoofs and voices had died entirely away, and he could hear only the faint patter of the leaves or the distant bark of a shepherd's dog. He stood there bareheaded; the deep blue sky shone bright with cloudless moonlight, the shadowed country road stretching in vague indistinctness on either hand,—stood impressed for the first time in his life with the responsibility and importance of his position, and almost prayerfully he wished himself more worthy of it.

Do not such-like solemn aspirations come to us all? but how few of us cherish them into realities!

Mrs. Francis walked silently by her husband's side by The Park wall, over which hung blossoming trees; while the girls, some in the

phaeton, and some afoot, talked incessantly of the delightful day they had spent.

"And papa gave all that delicious place up for mamma," Norah was heard to say.

"Such crowds of gooseberries too!" Nelly added.

"Oh, but the flowers!" Margaret exclaimed. "Did you ever see such lovely green-houses?"

"It's no good wishing," Bell continued: "but I wish the little fellow would beg of us to accept it all as a small token of his regard;" and then they all laughed heartily at the idea, even Susy's soft voice joining in.

"Ah what youth can sport with!" Mrs. Francis whispered. "Dear Francis, it is true,—through me you have lost that beautiful place."

"And what have I gained!" he answered."

And the elderly pair looked fondly at each other, with a purer love speaking from heart to heart than they had felt in their cloudless, early dawn, before sorrow and trial borne together had knit them in inviolable union.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE LATEST TELEGRAM.

Of course Clack boasted a news-room, where, besides the *Yorkshireman* and the *Yorkshire Gazette*, one copy of the *Times* might be seen the day after issue, besides *Punch*, the *Illustrated*, and *Bell's Life*, which, reaching Clack on Sunday, were kept unopened till the Monday morning. This room had two bow windows with muslin blinds, and the ladies of Clack spoke of it as grander dwellers in grander towns speak of club-houses. All the scandal of the little town was said to be concocted herein, whence unseen behind its innocent curtains, the male occupants looked forth on the little street and commented on the female passers-by.

Miss Wright was wont to put on her newest attire on market-days,—when gay young gentle-

men farmers rode in to discuss the markets and the local news,—and dare their ribald remarks by passing slowly up and down in front of this centre of gossip; but Miss Clacker had been taught to consider it bold and unmaidenly to be seen in the High Street when so many of the stern sex were about; and there were others of Miss Crocodilla's standing who held the like antiquated opinion.

Mr. Theodore held the important office of honorary secretary. He it was who kept the accounts, pinned and cut the papers, saw that the coals were not watered (in Clack parlance, "slecked"), regulated the season of fires and the season of open doors, ordered the muslin curtains to be washed or renewed, changed the flower-pots on the wide window-ledge, and kept the whole concern in order. The elaborate rules framed and hung up opposite the door were in his ornate phraseology, and had puzzled many homely brains to construe; and he mended the pens and limited the

supply of ink and paper. So highly were Mr. Theodore's literary attainments prized by his fellow-townsmen, that when it was proposed to get up a paper called, *The Nunbriar and Clack Express*, he was called upon to be the editor for the Clack share of it; but he declined, on the plea that public business had already too many claims on his time, and he could not lend his talents to any scheme wherein Clack was to play second fiddle.

Then there arose a discussion as to the propriety of placing Clack first on the paper,—*The Clack and Nunbriar Express;* but Nunbriar would not knock under, so Mr. Theodore kept aloof altogether.

It was very gratifying to be important, even on a small scale; and for long after taking office a complacent smile overspread Mr. Theodore's face, as day after day the postman's knock heralded the arrival of papers addressed, —To the Honorary Secretary. No one dreamed of disputing his perfect right to have them

delivered at his own house, whence he himself took them to the public room.

Mr. Shrugg was thus able to get the first reading of the news, without being mixed up with his neighbours; and by this means he first heard of a fresh cause for anxiety.

A telegram from Alexandria met his eyes one morning; briefly this:—

"June 7th.—The rumoured assassination of three English gentlemen is believed to be incorrect. Mr. Seymour has returned to his hotel, and it is hoped that his companions will be found alive. Every effort is being made for their discovery by the authorities."

Mr. Shrugg took this paper home and read it to his family. All Clack would soon know; it was better Margaret should hear it from those who were aware of her deep interest in the subject, than that it should be suddenly announced to her in public.

But whereas Clack decided at once that the Dales were childless, Mr. Shrugg's wife and

daughters took a much more hopeful view of the case. In the first place, they agreed the report might not refer to John Dale and his party at all. Seymour was not an uncommon name; in fact, Seymour might not be the right name, — telegrams always blundered over names. In all probability, John Dale and his friends were far enough away from Alexandria. It was hardly likely they would stay longer than they could possibly avoid in that hot, filthy, unhealthy city, where the worst features of dirty French life were mixed with the worst parts of dirtier and more revolting Egyptian life. The very thought of Alexandria in June, was enough to bring on an attack of plague. So while the neighbours pictured the gay young hunter stark and dead, disfigured by the deadly knives of people they supposed to be cannibals,—at least savages,— in the dower house little anxiety was felt till the next day; and then the blow fell. For Mrs. Dale herself, who was believed to be

still in London, was seen in the gloaming, in bodily presence coming towards the family group sitting in the old-fashioned garden. All started up to meet her, guessing before she spoke why she was there.

"I have come straight from the station," she said. "I go back again to-morrow;" and while she was shaking hands all round, her gaze was on, and her words were only for, Margaret. "When did you hear from John last?" she added.

Margaret forgot all but their mutual interest; she felt a sudden shock pervade body and soul, but she answered calmly, "More than a month since,—early in May."

"Why! not since? Never from Alexandria?

"No; I promised papa not to correspond, and I told John not to write again."

"Oh, why not!" she cried bitterly. "The foolish, foolish lad!"

"What is it?" Mr. Francis Shrugg ex-

claimed. "We know nothing. Sit down,—tell us all about it?"

"Don't you know?" she answered. "No, no, I can't stay. Mr. Dale will start by the mail on Sunday; I must be back to London before. I came down, hoping Margaret knew something; it was my forlorn hope."

With quiet force, Mrs. Shrugg placed her in a chair.

"You can't start till seven in the morning," she said affectionately. "Tell us all you know."

"The papers have told you all, I know," she cried. "They are all made away with, somehow; all but young Seymour. It was some row they got into—how can I tell what?"

"Hush—hush!" cried Susy, "look at Margaret, papa!"

Margaret was standing with livid face and closed eyes, her hands tightly clenched, as if she was struggling with herself; for an instant she swayed, and then before her father could reach her, she fell.

"Poor child," Mrs. Dale exclaimed, quickly kneeling down, and raising the girl's head to her lap.

Margaret was insensible but for a second, but though she was almost immediately able to rise by herself, yet her shaking limbs and deadly pallor belied her brave words.

"I am all right. Mamma, do make Mrs. Dale have some food; she will be knocked up."

Mrs. Dale was very much softened; down in her heart she was feeling the share she had in her son's untimely death. Sorrow had hardened and embittered Mrs. Robert Shrugg; it was working differently in Mrs. Dale. She acquiesced in Margaret's suggestion; went into the house; ate supper; thankfully accepted the offered bed, and did her utmost to believe in her friend's comforting suggestions as to the inaccuracy of the telegraph. But when Margaret had gone to bed, and the poor mother was able to tell all the fears of those who were acquainted with the perils of Alexandria, hope

that John Dale would turn up again unhurt, became very faint.

The young men had left Alexandria weeks before, in order that the artist might sketch in the interior, but a mutiny amongst their native servants obliged them to return to that city to have them punished, and to obtain a fresh supply. It was supposed that these discarded servants had revenged themselves by attacking three of the gentlemen, as they were imprudently walking late at night, after dining at a house in the suburbs: so a private telegram to old Sir John Seymour, inferred. Mr. Seymour recognised a face amongst the ten or twelve men who started up on the banks of the Mahmoudieh Canal; but as he was attacked and rendered senseless by a violent blow on the head, before he had time to strike in return, he knows nothing concerning the fate of his companions,—John Dale and a Captain Scott. On recovering his senses, he found himself lying amongst

some reeds, half in and half out of the water; whence he was rescued by a European passer-by, and conveyed to his hotel.

Most probably, the other two young men, on seeing their companion fall, fought desperately; and would in return meet with no compassion. The attackers must have overpowered them at last, and no doubt carried them away in a boat,—either dead, in which case there was little chance of their bodies ever being found, or else as prisoners, to be given up only on payment of heavy ransoms. The latter possibility was the slender chance to which Mrs. Dale clung, but Mr. Shrugg had not an atom of hope left in his mind. His belief was that the fate of John Dale and Captain Scott would add another to the long roll of mysterious disappearances of adventuresome travellers. Was not Alexandria proverbial for its dangers after nightfall? were not dead bodies continually being found there? were not the Egyptians the most vindictive and cruel of

semi-civilized people? So long as young men will despise prudence and laugh at caution, so long will these tragedies be played. The very inhabitants of the large villas which line the one side of the long road by the Mahmoudieh canal would hesitate to walk in front of their own gates after dark; yet here were three young English strangers, who had incurred the anger of some of the lowest order of the Alexandrians, venturing to walk at midnight, unarmed, except by sticks, through a little-frequented road that led through a native suburb. But Mr. Shrugg tried his best to hide his convictions, and to cheer his guest and daughter. Mrs. Dale set off for London early in the morning, without seeing Margaret again.

"Give her my dear love," she said; "and tell her I will hope we shall soon meet to rejoice over our lost sheep."

She went away with a smile on her lips, but her heart was very sore; none the better for the remembrance of Margaret's unspoken grief.

Margaret came downstairs to breakfast, and to her usual duties; she checked her sisters when they would have offered commonplace hopes and conjectures. She offered no opinion of her own, but bore herself as if she would rather hear no conjectures and receive no sympathy. Not that she was hard and stern, but she felt that dread uncertainty too acutely to trust herself to discuss it, or hear it discussed.

Her father simply gave her Mrs. Dale's message, adding, "She has promised to let me hear whatever she hears, directly."

That was all Mr. Shrugg said to her, and Margaret gratefully kissed him without speaking. Her evident wish was quickly understood in the family, and all tried to continue their ordinary habits and manners in her presence; but this was not easy. For nine days, the newspapers were full of the "Alexandrian Murders." Some thought "such foolhardy people, who despised common prudence, and

braved certain danger, deserved the punishment of their stupidity." Some "hoped it would be a lesson to other idle aristocrats to stay at home and do some work, instead of drawing down trouble and expense upon their own government and that of the country whose known habits they had ignored." Others considered "it was enough to make the blood of every free-born Briton boil, and that it behoved England to rise in all her ancient majesty, and show such savages what vengeance meant." Some were for raising a public subscription, to offer an enormous reward for the missing men; and some went so far as to advise the enrolment of a body of sympathising Englishmen to go out to Alexandria,—a self-constituted set of search officers, to leave no stone unturned, in "that Egyptian hot-bed of vice and lawlessness, till the unfortunate victims or their remains should be discovered." The opinion of all in the present state of ignorance of the exact facts

of the case, was, that English subjects ought to be protected wherever they chose to go, but that a certain degree of blame was attached to those who persisted in running unnecessary risks.

Margaret read everything that was published on the subject, but said not a word; but her inward inquietude was painfully evident. Her bright dry eyes fixed themselves, full of intense anxiety, on her father's face every time he entered the house; her attention was eager for every noise, however slight; and at post-times the impatient blood would come and go to her already pallid face, until every corner of the newspapers had been pored over, and every letter opened.

Every few days Mrs. Dale wrote to Mrs. Shrugg: her husband and Sir John Seymour had gone to Alexandria. Telegrams were continually passing between the friends of the missing in England, and the remainder of the party in Egypt. The Egyptian government

were on the alert; large rewards were offered. Search was being made all over the city,—even in the boats on the canal and in the teeming harbour. Parties who had left Alexandria about the time of the outrage, both by land and sea, had been overtaken by emissaries of the Porte, and questioned and overhauled; but as yet all search and inquiry was useless. There was no more trace left of the deed than as if it had never been done, except on the bruised and battered body of its fortunate survivor, young Seymour.

When Mr. Dale reached the spot, he could discover no more than was already known; he could only repeat what Mr. Seymour could tell him, and that was little enough. John Dale's own servants had had no part in the mutiny, when they were out. John Dale himself had had nothing to do with the occasion of their return to Alexandria. He had wanted to go on to Rosetta alone, there to await the arrival of the remainder of the party, after they had

had their unruly men punished and obtained another set; but he was over-persuaded to return also.

With much compunction, Mr. Dale heard how his boy's spirits had fallen.

"He got a letter, when we first came here," Mr. Seymour said, "that seemed to floor him; but he laughed when we taxed him with having had bad news, and never mentioned to any of us,—not even to me, who shared his cabin, and tent,—the real reason of his coming with us."

"That letter must have been from poor Diana," wrote the Squire to Mrs. Dale, "telling him not to write again. Oh, Gertrude, we should not have let him go!"

Her own heart had uttered that dreary cry, —how often! Day and night,—day and night; in her dreams; in her daily duties; alone, or with friends,—"We should not have let him go!"

And she had sent him. And then she remembered how coldly he had said good-bye;

how he must have thought of her as his enemy; how he must have died believing this!

But for long her dauntless spirit bore up,—before the world, at least. She besieged ambassadors' doors; she wrote to every influential diplomatist she knew, personally or through mutual friends. She said she knew her boy had never died like a worried rat; he would be found, a prisoner, perhaps; but she was sure he was not dead, though his bright spirit must be sorely fretted by his position. But when she was alone, other and gloomier pictures were uppermost.

All these alternating feelings of hope and despair were Margaret's too; but she had not the privilege possessed by his mother,—she could not openly bewail her lost one. She had no maternal right to work day and night on his behalf; she must not mourn publicly, for with her love was there not also a tinge of shame?

Happy Susy could bewail her dead,—her sorrow was becoming; but Margaret must learn

to compose her feelings, to discuss the subject with Mr. Theodore and Miss Wright as she would have discussed it had old Dr. Wright or Mr. Murkitroyd been the hero of the story instead of Johnny Dale. And this unnatural part was hard to assume, and dangerous.

Margaret could keep silence, and could force herself to act as if she had shared the general horror and regret. But though the young are strong to bear much, they show the effect of unwonted trouble quicker than do the old. Margaret slept, but it was the sleep of exhaustion; she ate because she knew her father's anxious eyes watched her; and she walked because any motion was relief. But none of these things did her good, and it was evident, in a very short time, that her bodily powers were being impaired,

"Margaret," said her father, at last, "if you like, you may as well go to the Sims's at once; they told you to fix your own time, you know. I think a change will do you good."

She caught at the idea gladly. The Sims's knew nothing of her love affair, and Linda was away. There she would learn the earliest tidings, if any tidings ever came; and there she would be free from the hourly espionage of eyes that, loving though they were, were like so many gaolers over her looks and actions.

A cordial reply to Margaret's proposal to join her friends at once came without delay. Mrs. Sims wrote a long, gossiping letter; among the news of the day, she mentioned the prevailing matter of conversation,—that sad affair at Alexandria, and inquired, Was one of the poor girls' young men any relation to the Dales they mentioned in their letters? She felt thankful she had no sons to get into such scrapes; "young men, now-a-days, were so foolish."

Margaret half repented having said she would go, but when she arrived in Sussex Gardens newer topics of public interest had arisen, and "that sad affair at Alexandria" was not even

mentioned by her old friends till Mrs. Dale appeared on the scenes.

But Margaret's appearance shocked them greatly, and Mr. Sims, who had been boasting of the beauty about to visit them, felt personally aggrieved at the sensible diminution of her good looks.

Mrs. Frederick Lington, who rushed in as soon as she heard of Margaret's arrival, did not scruple to remark on her faded beauty.

"Good gracious me!" she cried, with her usual refinement of expression. "Why, I declare I'll never go near Yorkshire, if it has that effect on one's good looks. I declare, Margaret, that little Bell cuts you out, and you used to take the shine out of 'em all!"

"I might retaliate," cried Margaret, with a little of her old spirit; "and declare I'll never come near London, if it has that effect on one's good manners. I expected matrimony would have toned you down, Emily."

"Come, now; I see how it is," Mrs. Lington

continued. "You've been moped to death, I guess. You come to me whenever you want some fun,—I'm still at pa's, you know,—and we'll go off in my new carriage, and cut a dash in the park. I've got such a swell phaeton! Mrs. Sims can tell you,—can't you, Mrs. Sims?"

Strange to say, Margaret did not shun her friendly overtures. Her rather vulgar patronage amused her now, though it formerly would have irritated. The unceasing talk allowed Margaret the blessed privilege of remaining silent, and her intense egotism kept her from curiosity concerning Margaret's past doings and present plans.

An egotistical friend is a famous tonic in some cases, and Margaret was at her ease in her company, and feared no interference with her deepest feelings.

As soon as Mrs. Dale knew of Margaret's arrival in London, she sent for her. Margaret had longed for this summons, and obeyed it quickly.

She found Mrs. Dale looking sick and old; and Mrs. Dale was struck with the young lady's pinched cheeks and dark rimmed eyes; but neither expressed her thoughts on the other's changed appearance.

The Dales had no town house of their own, being in that respect below Captain Shrugg, who owned a tall, dim house in Brook Street, where his father had died; but the Dales' property was smaller than the Shruggs', and even in her great sorrow Mrs. Dale remembered this, as she welcomed a Shrugg to her hired house in Southwick Crescent.

"I like a cheerful situation better than a merely fashionable one," she said. "I am so glad we haven't a gloomy old family house, and can take what we fancy, and have done with it when we go to Yorkshire. Your cousin must hate having to go always to that same old-fashioned Brook Street house."

"I too am glad," Margaret said; "for here I can reach you easily."

Mrs. Dale was affected by the unexpected kindliness of this simple remark.

"Ah, my dear!" she said, "I don't deserve that from you." Margaret was very near breaking down—the tight quivering grasp of her fingers on Mrs. Dale's showed how near; but she feared to give way, and the elder lady feared too. In their tearless gaze at each other, in the instant's silence that followed, and in that unrelaxed strain of the delicate hands, was an eloquence greater than words. Margaret felt their enmity was over. Mrs. Dale knew no half-measures; she at once took her young friend back into her fullest confidence; but Margaret could not forget all at once, though she freely and fully forgave.

"You must come and stay with me now," Mrs. Dale protested. But here she could not have her will: Margaret would see her daily, but would not consent to leave her old friends the Sims's altogether. "Besides," she added, "I am busy trying to find a situation."

"My dear, you must not do that: you are not fit just yet. Finish your promised stay with Mrs. Sims, and then come to me; but you must not go amongst strangers yet."

But again the girl was firm. "It was best for her to be actively employed," she said.

And many a weary visit did Margaret pay to her would-be employers; but her sadness, her sickly look, and her unnaturally subdued manner, frightened many happy young mothers who would otherwise have been suitable friends for her, and she herself at last, after several repulses, felt Mrs. Dale was right: at present she was not fit to go amongst strangers.

London was at its gayest and hottest. Open windows, filled with sweet flowers, lined the aristocratic streets; glittering carriages, bearing fair ladies and gentlemen, apparently fainting with heat and *ennui*, thronged the park; and through these gay scenes, and amidst these vapid careless holiday folk, Margaret was taken, feeling how great was the gulf between

all this glitter and show and her chilled and and careworn spirit.

"Holloa, Cousin Margaret!" cried out Captain Shrugg, reining up his shining chestnut as he recognised her face in Mrs. Sims's little brougham, waiting amid a score of other carriages to see the Queen enter Hyde Park; "Why, what's the matter? You"—and then a sudden remembrance darting to his mind made him start afresh,—"I—I mean, I didn't expect to see you. The Setons back? or are you staying elsewhere?"

Margaret understood the little man's hesitation, and came to his relief. She explained with whom she was staying, and asked his movements.

"He was thinking of selling out," he said, "without waiting for his majority, though it seemed near; but those fellows in authority," he added, "won't let one alone, or I'd stay in if they'd just give me leave of absence through the season."

He was in high spirits: the gay scene around him was his natural element. He was in deep mourning yet, according to the world's ideas of mourning, for he wore a high band on his hat, and his coat and trowsers were of black, as was also the handkerchief round his neck; but the white waistcoat and spotless gloves of pale lavender were as little like gloom as were his spirits. He asked after all her family, mentioning Bell last; and then, looking away from her, he asked after the Dales.

Margaret answered him calmly; indeed she was glad to hear whether the general view was hopeful or hopeless. "I often see Mrs. Dale," she said; "Mr. Dale is still in Alexandria. What do you think of it all?"

"I think," Captain Robin said, carefully attending to his horse's mane as he spoke, "I think it is useless for the poor squire to stay broiling out there."

"But Captain Scott's people are remaining there," she said.

"There is a telegram from Sir John Seymour to-day," he replied, "Lady Seymour wrote to tell me just before I came out now. He is bringing Seymour home by the next mail,—" "Well?" Margaret said. "And," her cousin added, "Sir John says every possible means have been tried to trace the others unavailingly. Now I must move on."

Without turning to see the effect of his words, Captain Robin raised his hat and passed on.

Mrs. Sims put her young friend down in Southwick Crescent, and there left her to pay her daily visit.

Mrs. Dale was in, and had heard from Lady Seymour. Margaret was alarmed at her appearance, and tried to comment hopefully on Sir John's telegram.

"I have seen Monsieur Errounce again to-day," Mrs. Dale said. "Mrs. Scott took me to the embassy. He was very kind; but what he said convinces me John cannot be in Alex-

andria alive; our only chance is of finding him amongst some of the wandering Egyptians. It is just possible they are hiding him, severely hurt, till he is able to negociate with us, or till the first commotion of the attack has blown over. They tell me, too," Mrs. Dale said falteringly, "Mr. Dale ought not to stay in that unhealthy place,—he, accustomed to such fresh cool air,—but *I* cannot urge him to come away. What can I do Margaret?"

Margaret had heard and read—as indeed who has not?—of the inefficiency and apathy of the Egyptian Government, and no doubt she had a fair share of her native disbelief in the efficiency of any Government excepting her own.

"You know Turks are proverbially stupid and apathetic," she urged, "and Monsieur Errounce speaks as a Turk. *I* would not leave the country, and I am sure Mr. Dale won't, till something is really found out. I would raze the horrible city to the ground sooner."

"But," Mrs. Dale cried, "if I lose them both there love?"

"It is hard to be a woman now," Margaret exclaimed, passionately resenting the impotency of her sex. "I think *I* would find them! I know Mr. Dale will never give up."

"My dear child," Mrs. Sims said, when Margaret came in, looking more dead than alive, "that poor woman should not worry you with her trouble. I don't think your mamma would like to see you so fagged."

"Tell you what it is," laughed Mr. Sims, "I shall begin to suspect you took more than a friendly interest in the poor young fellow, Miss Margaret!"

Margaret sat down to her dinner, and nearly choked over it: she could not reply with a joke; she could not excuse the poor mother's apparent selfishness. Mrs. Sims and her husband exchanged glances and kindly changed the subject; but from that hour they threw no further obstacle in the way of Margaret's visits.

"There seems a fatality against those dear girls," Mrs. Sims said privately to her husband. "We ought not to grieve because we have no children."

Mrs. Dale seemed consuming away with inward fever. She made up her mind to go to her husband, to see for herself whether the climate was harming him. She was not fit to go, but go she would; and then she begged Margaret to go with her.

Alas for Margaret! her purse was empty. Cabs to different parts of London in search of a situation had run away with all her slender stock of money. She could not take more from her sorely pressed father; she could not accept it from Mrs. Dale. It would be an expensive journey, she knew, and her wardrobe was not furnished for all contingencies. Her inability to accompany the poor mother was another bitter drop in Margaret's already brimming cup of poverty and sorrow. Mrs. Dale scolded and coaxed, but Mrs. Dale's friends were all

against the scheme for herself, and utterly rejected the notion of saddling herself with a companion who looked so little able to be of service to any one. So Margaret worked hard to start her friend comfortably, and then, having seen her in the train for Dover, went sadly back to Sussex Gardens, chafing and fretting at the hard fate that kept her idle and useless when her life's happiness was at stake.

Who can wonder that her beauty faded?

For three weeks she heard nothing except one small mention in the newspapers, as follows:—

"The mystery attending the fate of two English gentlemen at Alexandria remains uncleared, but we understand their friends are still untiring in their efforts to gain intelligence on the spot."

Then came a little note from Mrs. Dale. She said she was glad she had joined her husband, for he was sadly depressed, "and no wonder. The place was scarcely bearable, the

dirt disgusting, and the police provoking beyond endurance."' She gave no hope; she did not mention her own health; but the faint and trembling writing was not assuring, and Margaret's hopes sank lower and lower.'

No situation yet; and she felt if one presented itself, she was unable to fulfil its duties. How easy it had been to say, "I won't add to poor papa's troubles: I'll be a governess!" but here was July. In a week more Mr. Shrugg would move his family south, and Margaret had not the means to return to them without asking her father for money to bring her back, a burden on his hands still.

CHAPTER XIX.

A VOICE FROM THE DEAD.

If poor Margaret felt it a relief to get away from watchful eyes at home, so did her departure relieve those she left behind. They could all talk openly in her absence of Johnny Dale's chance of life, and within a very few hours they had all openly confessed how slight they held that chance to be.

Two love lorn damsels in one household were surely more than a fair share; and the father and mother, while bemoaning the hard lot that had clouded the lives of two of their darlings, could not regret they were for a little time prevented seeing Margaret's struggles with her grief. Susy had been stricken and crushed like a trodden flower, and like a trodden flower she had humbly submitted to the pain; but Margaret had been seared as a tall tree struck

by lightning, and still stood erect, conspicuous in her mutilation.'

"I am thankful," wrote Bell to Linda, when telling all these additional cares the parents felt on Margaret's behalf, "I am thankful they are quite ignorant of the pangs *I* suffer." Bell did not mention how frequently her pangs found vent in gay songs and romps in the garden with her little sister, nor how faint the remembrance of her girlish fancy for Mr. Frederick Lington had become. On wet days she still believed in her seared and widowed existence, but on fine ones she never bestowed a thought on the subject. Her head was now full of the future, in which she meant to do so much towards getting her own living.

Packing up had commenced, and Norah was made happy by being allowed to help her father to arrange the old squire's receipts preparatory to locking them up in the old escritoire which was to remain in the old dower house. Norah scrutinised each worn document, hoping to find

that missing receipt Mr. Theodore had said to be amongst them; but though her search for it was not rewarded with success, she came upon part of a diary; and this so delighted her father, that she was emboldened to tell him what she wanted, and learned he could gratify her desire for information.

"Bless me!" Mr. Francis said with a sigh, "this is the poor old man's diary, dated only two years before he died. I am glad to see this;" and as Norah had found it, she was permitted to read its contents. The entries were mostly uninteresting records of the weather, till the old gentleman came to the relation of a journey to London, and dated his entries from Brook Street.

"Took a hackney coach," one day's record began, "and went towards dusk to the Regent's Park. Stopped opposite Frank's house."

"Yours, papa?" Norah cried.

"Yes. You know we lived in Regent's Park when we first married. 'Saw my poor

boy on the balcony with his two little girls. How well and happy he looked! The mother, too—the hussey—what a pretty girl she is! She stood in the window, with one child in her arms, and another clinging to her gown. Why won't the lad ask my pardon ?' "

Mr. Francis shook his head sadly. "He did think kindly of us, then," he said. "I am thankful he wrote this. How I wish I'd seen him!" Then again another entry.

"'Came home this evening. Saw Loftus before starting.' Loftus,—Loftus," said Mr. Francis, "who's he? Oh, I know: that old lawyer who drew up the deed of separation between poor Robert and his wife. He died just before my grandfather.—'Saw Loftus this morning; he had made all the inquiries. Seems Mrs. Frank is a very good young woman,—capital wife and mother, tradespeople and servants say. Very happy respected family —sweet little girls.'—You were not born then, Miss Norah.—'Left instructions with Loftus. Cold journey; gout threatening.'

"Poor old grandfather!" Mr. Francis exclaimed. "I must go up, and show this to your mother. She'll be gratified."

"But is there no more, papa?"

"No," he said, turning over the few remaining leaves, "nothing more, except about farming matters, weather, etc., and list of two or three visitors. Here is old Dale's name,—this man's father you know: 'Dale dined here to meet Loftus.' And here's Exelby's uncle: 'Fred Exelby came to buy the grey—shan't let him have him; he bids too low.' Ha, ha!" laughed Mr. Francis, "the old man knew nothing about horses, but believed all his must be superexcellent."

This little souvenir of a forfeited affection pleased Mr. Shrugg immensely. "And he evidently took the trouble to inquire about us from the neighbours," he said to his wife; "and he admired you, eh! that is best of all, Susan. I always said if he only saw you, he would understand my obstinacy, as he called it."

"Ah, when it was too late!" Mrs. Francis answered. "But I am glad he went out of the world with kinder feelings towards us. I think, though, he might have mentioned you with less bitterness in his will."

"Well, well; that will was made some years before this diary was written. Very likely he'd forgotten the angry wording."

"But," cried Norah, "who knows, papa, but that he made another will! I shouldn't wonder if there is a secret drawer in that escritoire. You know old Mrs. Clacker always says her husband said great grandpapa seemed to care most for you at the last."

"Oh, Norah!" cried her mother, "how you let your imagination run away with your senses!"

"And grammar," her father added, laughing. "But there is a secret drawer: the old man showed it me, when I was no taller than Nelly."

"Oh, papa! have you looked into it?"

"No, I haven't; but to please you, I will."

There was general excitement now; even Susy was eager and curious, and all but Susy followed Mr. Shrugg downstairs, and stood in increasing excitement round him while he gratified their curiosity.

But, alas! the secret drawer held only the accumulated dust of years.

The girls tapped the old piece of furniture all round, and listened eagerly for a hollow sound to suggest another receptacle of which their papa was ignorant.

"Now, now, now!" cried the latter, at last, "enough of this nonsense. Be off all of you, and Norah, come back to your work.

But the remnant of the diary was not put back in its place. Mr. Shrugg placed it amongst his valuables. It was like a blessing come to him from the grave.

The packing went on, but no day was yet fixed for their departure. Susy's nomination to the hospital was not to be till the last

week in July. As soon after that as was possible the final start would be taken. Her election would have been almost hopeless, had not an anonymous subscriber come forward, and paid a sum that entitled her to the vacancy, and so saved further trouble of soliciting votes. That Mr. Murkitroyd was the anonymous friend was the belief of all the family; but as he chose to express unqualified astonishment and pleasure about it, Mr. Shrugg could not tax him with the act.

"When I get quite well," said Susy, "I will thank him for having cured me."

Susy's one desire was to gain the use of her limbs, so as to cease burthening her parents; no doubt that strong desire was a great help to her recovery. On the 30th of July she was elected, and her presence at the hospital was ordered on or before the 10th of August. This unexpected reprieve was pleasant, but not quite convenient. The new chemist from Leeds had already paid, through Mr. Murkitroyd, two-

hundred and seventy-five pounds, and was to pay the remaining moiety on taking possession on the 1st of August, which date Mr. Shrugg had himself fixed, thinking to have left the house about that time. But as Mr. Murkitroyd was urgent in saying Susy must be taken direct to the hospital from Clack, that her strength might not be unnecessarily tried by further moving, there was a difficulty about remaining longer than was agreed upon with the in-comer, who had so honourably kept his part of the bargain.

On hearing this, however, Mr. Murkitroyd at once smoothed away the seeming dilemma. His young friend was in no hurry for two or three weeks; in fact, he was rather glad of the reprieve, as it would enable him to go to York races comfortably before settling down to hard work. August, therefore, found the family still at Clack. And August brought Captain Robin again to Shrugg, and with him his only sister, Mrs. Morton.

Captain Shrugg rode to see his cousins the day after his arrival, and apologised for his sister's non-appearance with him.

"She's a delicate creature," he said, "and doesn't ride; and she's been spoilt, you know, and doesn't like coming through the dusty roads in my mother's open phaeton, but she hopes to see you some day."

"No doubt she feels disinclined to see strangers," Mrs. Francis said kindly. "This must be a sad visit for her."

"Oh—ah—yes," said the captain. "I got her to come, for you see there are all my poor mother's things left just as they were. That old Martin chose to fall ill, and has been with her friends ever since, and none of the other servants were to be trusted, so I just locked up her room, and there it is; but I don't think Clara likes the job. You ladies are very whimsical, Cousin Bell!"

"Inherit it from our fathers, Cousin Robin. Is Mr. Morton here?"

"No, he's at York for the races. I'm going to join him there, if I can get Clara through her work; but she hasn't begun it yet."

"Has she any children?"

"Well, I think she has two or three," he answered doubtfully. "But she doesn't care for that sort of thing; Morton's mother takes care of them, Clara's nerves are bad, you know."

"She must be an amiable creature," Bell said indignantly when the captain had gone. "I suppose she doesn't choose to see us."

Which was really the case. Mrs. Morton had been coaxed to go to Shrugg, to look over the things that had belonged to a mother of whom she had no recollection; and no sooner had she reached The Park, than she repented having come, declared the rooms gave her the vapours, and that she was unequal to the pain of entering the cottage where her unknown mother had passed so many sad years.

"I'll ask some of Francis Shrugg's daughters

to come and help you," said the captain, on hearing this excuse. "They were very kind to our mother."

"I dare say," Mrs. Morton rejoined; "but I'm really not equal to entertaining that kind of people at present,—though they might have the old clothes, if you like."

"Offer them old clothes! By Jove, I'd like to see you do it!"

"Why, what else can we do with them? They are sure to be too old-fashioned for my maid; beside, I don't choose her to know all the circumstances—that's why I left her behind me?"

"My dear child," said he, solemnly, "you forget they are ladies—lovely girls some of them—make a sensation everywhere."

"Oh, I dare say!" she said scornfully. "I heard some young squire down here fell in love with one of them."

"Young Dale, who was murdered at Alexandria," he interposed.

"Ah, yes,—Dale. And she was pointed out to me in the park the other day: a regular fright I considered her, and you called her a beauty!"

"So she was, till she began to grieve. But the others are a different style. There's Bell, a perfect Hebe!"

"My dear Robert, when I hear a girl called a Hebe, I see exactly the sort of creature:—a pink and white doll, with a turned-up nose, and tow-like curling hair, always has a cold in her head in winter, and chilblains, and pudgy, damp hands."

"By Jove!" he repeated, "I should like you to see them. Come over with me."

"No," she said; "I really must decline going to Clack. It would kill me to meet—that other person."

"Well, he's an unmitigated snob, I must say; but I do wish you'd be civil to the others," Robin said.

"Then once for always, dear," she said,

languidly, "I tell you, I've kept clear of them all my life, and I mean to do so for the future. It is very hard, the minute I come to my native country, after broiling so long in Athens, that I am to be bored to death by poor relations."

Miss Clacker, on hearing of Mrs. Morton's arrival at The Park, said confidently to Norah, that she'd never heard any good of her.

"A fine lady she is!" said Miss Crocky, indignantly; "scorned her own mother, and never looks after her own children. A little, vain, weak woman!"

As for Mr. Theodore, he avoided even the road leading towards Shrugg,—so keen an aversion had he for his selfish sister.

"T' old squire never liked her, even when she was a child," Mrs. Clacker said on the same subject. "Jerry says he once saw him flick her ears for some naughtiness or other. He'd play with t' little lad, but he never could abide t' lass. What's she come to Shroogg for?"

"To look after poor Mrs. Robert's things," Norah explained.

"To take t' bits of jewels, I reckon," the old lady exclaimed. "She'll no' trouble herself to do any work. Jerry said to me last night, 't' old squire is coming round."

Miss Crocky shook her head. "Mother 's a bit jumbled," she said apologetically; "so many generations, you see, to remember."

"The old woman was right," Mr. Francis said, a few days later. "I met Robin just now, and he's had to send his sister off. Her feelings wouldn't permit her to enter her mother's room," he added, with unwonted sarcasm.

"Poor thing!" said his wife.

"Poor thing!" he rejoined. "I couldn't help asking if she'd not accepted any little keepsake; and he grinned when he acknowledged she took all the jewellery and the drawing-room ornaments, and asked for the piano to be sent, after all! He's coming to see you to-day."

He came in by-and-by, looking rather crest-fallen.

"Poor Clara's gone," he said. "She needn't have come at all, for any good she's done. Mrs. Shrugg, what am I to do about all the clothes? I can't tell what ought to be kept, and what given away."

"Perhaps if we packed all up and sent them to your sister's house, she could bear to look at them there."

"Pooh!" he ejaculated. "She would be seriously ill at the mere idea."

"There are some beautiful laces," Mrs. Shrugg said. "Your mother showed them to me one day." (She did not add how warmly they had been pressed on her acceptance, and how she had scrupled to accept them because of their value.) "Those you ought to lock up for your future wife. Lace, you know, like jewellery, is always desirable."

He gave a little knowing nod. "Then I'm glad poor Clara didn't turn them over," he said.

"She has a good many weaknesses, poor girl, and acquisitiveness is one. I'll have a look, then, myself. I don't like servants handling her clothes."

He looked wistfully at her, as he said this.

"If I could be of any use," she said, "I could spare a few hours to put aside what should be given to Martin, and what is too good for servants."

He eagerly thanked her. "I was longing to ask you," he said. "Will you let me put everything into boxes and send them here for your inspection? You don't know how thankful I shall be."

"No;" she answered. "I would rather not have them here. I should prefer doing it all in your presence."

"Nay!" he expostulated. "That is too bad. I am not capable of judging ladies' wardrobes, either. My dear Mrs. Francis, don't be unkind. I have all her papers. Do you think I suppose you would deal unfairly with her old clothes?"

Mr. Francis was rather annoyed his wife should have made this offer. However, having been made and accepted, there was no help for it.

The captain wanted them all to come to Shrugg, and make another day of it. "Miss Bell could help her mamma," he thought: but Mrs. Shrugg declined his kind invitation for the rest. In fact, she was beginning to see he looked at Bell rather oftener than mere civility or cousinly regard warranted, and she meant to screen her remaining daughters from misplaced affection, if possible; so she went alone.

The captain was very attentive. He had ordered a delightful early dinner for her, and himself did the honours, broaching the choicest Madeira out of his father's cellar for her benefit; indeed, his civilities took up so much time, that she had not done half her work when the phaeton was announced to take her home.

The costly old lace had been found, and the

young man took possession of it with a chuckle that his sister should have so cleverly outwitted herself. But another day's work lay before them, and Mrs. Shrugg took Norah with her the next morning,—to Bell's disgust, and Norah's delight,—that, with her help, everything might be arranged before the captain left next day.

It was not such interesting work, though, as Norah anticipated; and after the first feeling of regret and sentiment at handling familiar things, once sacred to the owner's own private keeping, Norah found the folding and packing of linen a very monotonous occupation.

There was a chest of drawers, however, which attracted her attention, which was not to be touched till the other things were properly put out of the way. It was full of children's toys and books, and little belongings,—treasures,—all that were left to the deserted woman of those innocent days when she was the cherished inmate of a happy home.

Captain Robin had another choice little dinner ready for his guests, but had to leave them in the middle of it to attend to business at the great house.

"Everything will be put into boxes and ready to move by five o'clock," Mrs. Shrugg said. "There is only that old chest of things to empty now. We have made a list of the contents of each trunk. I think Norah can finish what there is to be done. I am sorry to have to cry off, but my head is very bad with stooping."

The captain was awfully sorry. Why should they do any more to-day,—why not come another day, and let him order the phaeton at once?

But Mrs. Shrugg wished everything to be ready for moving before he left. If the new bailiff was to have the house, the sooner it was placed at his disposal the better, that the painting and papering might be nicely dried before the hot weather was over.

Captain Shrugg declared she thought of everything. But he insisted she should go home; and if Norah would kindly pop the remaining things away, or let the servant do it under her superintendence, he would himself drive her home afterwards.

"Do let me, mamma!" cried Norah, enchanted at the idea of being invested with a little brief authority. "I'll be very careful and particular."

"Well," said Mrs. Shrugg, yielding, "but I'll send papa for you. You will like the walk home in the cool, dear."

"Ah, yes," the captain cried; "if Mr. Francis would not mind coming, that will be best; for I'm ashamed to say that I'd forgotten an appointment with old Rose, at Nunbriar, at five o'clock. Cousin Norah, I'll order you some of the thickest cream, and you must tell the servants what else you'd like for tea; but don't tire yourself, there's a good child. You are not offended? I can't stay."

Norah assured him thick cream would quite reconcile her to his absence. And when he had gone she hastened her mother's departure, for Mrs. Shrugg's heavy eyes showed how needful were quiet and rest.

The servant left at Norah's commands was quite a young country girl, who obeyed, open mouthed, and perpetually murmured, "Poor mistress!" as she watched the different things brought out. Her wonderment over the collection of broken toys was amusing; and she ventured to assure Norah it made her flesh "creep" to see the yellow baby-clothes and discoloured ribbons.

"Aw knew some'at 'ud happen," she said, "for t' bleuth was on t' trees so early this year."

"What's bleuth?" Norah asked.

"Eh! bleuth? why, t' bleuth 's t' blossom for sure."

Norah condescendingly smiled.

"Now we've got to the last drawer," she

said, "and then I dare say you'll be glad of your tea."

Oh, what rubbish this carefully-locked-away drawer contained, though its very lock was different to all the other drawers, as if it held articles of great value; and the key for it was only found, after much search, in the pocket of the gown Mrs. Shrugg had on at her seizure. Rubbish was the only fitting word to apply to this collection of old-fashioned finery. But do not all our treasures seem worthless in the eyes of those who have no clue to the hallowing memories and associations that make them priceless to their possessors? How could Norah guess that the discoloured gown and the heap of lace and feathers represented the once splendid wedding-dress of the poor discarded woman who had worn it in the zenith of her beauty and fair fame? Norah lifted it out of its protecting wraps, and laughed at its scanty breadth and yard-long train, its long-peaked waist, and ruffled elbow sleeves.

"Perhaps it was a grand balldress once," she thought. "We must take care of it, though; it will do for charades for somebody."

The paper round it was rotten with damp and age, and Norah bade the girl run down for fresh; meantime she went on emptying the drawers. There was only a little box left,—a Tunbridge ware work-box—a little old-fashioned thing such as we have all seen in our childhood. It had been sealed down, but the wax broke as Norah raised it.

There was nothing in it but a little thimble and a rusty scissors, and a roll of paper or parchment.

Norah's back was aching, as her mother's back had done, with stooping; she seated herself on the floor and opened the little roll.

A few minutes after the girl returned.

"I'll finish another day," Norah said, with thick and rapid utterance. "Where's Captain Shrugg?"

"At Nunbriar, or a'most, I reckon, now," was the answer.

Norah thrust the things back into the drawer, shut and locked it, and then put on her bonnet.

"I'm going home," she said, "I'll finish another day. Lock that box,—give me the key. I don't want any tea. Good afternoon." And she was off.

"I wonder what t' ladies would say if we took t' whimsies before our work wer' done, and cut our sticks yon gate?" said the girl, as she watched the young lady dart through the little shrubbery and across The Park, towards Clack.

Onward Norah flew. She felt neither fatigue nor heat, saw nothing,—not even old Dr. Wright, who was driving his daughter towards Nunbriar.

"That girl is quite a tomboy," said the genteel Miss Wright. "I wonder she is allowed to run wild in that fashion,—her bonnet all awry, and her face like a dairymaid's. I wonder what the Misses Palmer and Ellis

would have said had they seen one of their pupils in that state?"

Close at Clack Mr. Theodore encountered her, just as she was wildly running on, making for the lane leading to the garden door.

Mr. Theodore playfully extended his arms to check her speed.

"Whither away, most beauteous fay?" sang he.

"Don't!" she cried, thrusting herself past him. "Let me pass;" and she was out of his reach in an instant.

"Ah!" soliloquized the young man. "She's angry. I wonder whether she's vexed with me for forgetting the lavender drops at evening service on Sunday? She'll catch a fever if she runs at that rate this weather;" and he bared his brow to the faint, warm breeze.

Nelly was in the garden as Norah dashed into it.

"Where's Susy?" Norah cried.

"O Norah! papa's set off for you," said the

child. "How hot you look,—and your boots are so dusty,—and you've torn your frock,—and oh how hot you are!"

"Where's Susy?" Norah repeated; but without waiting for the answer, she rushed on into the house.

Sarah came out of the kitchen.

"Don't go near your ma," she said; "she's laying down, and Miss Susy is napping.

"I don't care," cried Norah, flying forward.

"Well—!" Sarah exclaimed, wrathfully.

Norah reached the sitting-room door, flung it open, aroused Susy, disturbed her mother, and distracted Bell with the violence of her entry. She held out the roll of paper towards the poor invalid, and cried hoarsely what she had been repeating as a lesson during her mad scamper home.

"I read you bad news once, dear. Listen to this!"

CHAPTER XX.

THE SWAN AT YORK.

DR. WRIGHT and his daughter were at supper when a message came to the former.

"Mr. Shrugg's compliments, and would the doctor kindly lend him his horse to ride over to Shrugg?"

"Who's come?" said the doctor.

"Sarah," was the answer. Every one knew every one's Christian name in Clack, and called them by it.

"Come in, Sarah!" he shouted, and folding her bare arms in her white apron, Sarah came curtseying forward.

"T' master's compliments, and please t' lend him t' hoss to ride out t' Shroogg," she repeated.

"To be sure, to be sure. He's ridden my horse when he was only a hobble-de-hoy," said

the doctor. "Nothing the matter, I hope, Sarah.

"Nay," said she; "some'at about t' auld missis's things, I reckon. Miss Norah came rampaging home, instead o' waiting for master t' fetch her, and telled some'at that set 'em all agate till master come back, only half an hour ago."

"My horse shall be there as soon as you are," said Dr. Wright. "Is your missis fond of cream cheese, Sarah?"

"Missis is nobbut cantly, to-night," she said, with a curtsey; "but t' young ladies knows what's good."

"Then," he added, "take this to them with my respects,—Dr. Wright's respects,—Sarah; and say, as their medical friend I advise them to make their supper of it, with a few radishes and young onions,—and their dreams will be light and pleasant."

And Miss Wright having placed the cheese on one of her best tea-plates, Sarah went off

with it, concealing it, as well as her bare arms, under her clean apron.

"There's something up, my dear," said the doctor. "Now, to-morrow, some of them must call and thank us for that, and we shall hear what it is."

Captain Robin sent back his horse and a message from Nunbriar, instead of himself returning, as he had intended. He had gone on to York by the late train, and should not be back at The Park for two or three days.

It was nearly ten o'clock when Mr. Francis Shrugg reached the dark, quiet house, and he had some difficulty in rousing the servants, who had already shut up for the night.

He was very much vexed on receiving the message Captain Robin had sent home.

"Where does your master put up in York?" he asked.

"At t' Swan, i' Coney Street; but he'll be here in two or three days," the woman repeated.

Mr. Francis bade her good-night, and turned his horse. Slowly he rode home through the quiet summer night,—his head bent, his eyes unmindful of the cloudless starry sky, his thoughts busy with other days.

Before noon next day, the waiter at the Swan announced to Captain Shrugg, who was with Mr. and Mrs. Morton, in their sitting-room at that hotel, that a gentleman wished to see him.

"What name?" said the captain, lazily.

"Your name, sir,—Shroogg, sir!"

"Show him up. What's he like?"

"Elderly gentleman, sir. Well dressed gentleman, sir!"

"Don't have him here," cried Clara.

But she was too late, the man had gone; and before she could escape, Mr. Francis Shrugg was in the room.

He held out his hand to Robin, and looked doubtfully at Mr. and Mrs. Morton.

"Sister Clara," Captain Shrugg said, waving

his hand just as Theodore would have done; "Clara's husband, Mr. Morton,—Morton, Clara, our father's cousin, Mr. Francis Shrugg."

There was a certain dignity in the little man's manner of mentioning his visitor, that made Clara hold out her hand, instead of contenting herself merely with a bow; but her fingers gave no response to his grasp. However, Mr. Shrugg noticed nothing formal; his thoughts were too intent on his errand. Mr. Morton never having heard of him before, received him cordially as a connection."

"All alone?" cried the captain. "Come up for the races?"

Mr. Francis drew a chair to the table, and seated himself, looking round him without speaking, with a solemn and yet an undecided air.

Captain Robin noticed, as the keen-eyed waiter had noticed, that his poor cousin was carefully and handsomely dressed. Indeed, his present attire had been his last purchase

in his days of prosperity, and since then had been kept to be worn only on fine Sundays and state occasions. He held himself erect, too,—as he had hardly done since his later troubles had fallen upon him; and even to Clara's sarcastic eyes he looked altogether above his position as a petty tradesman.

When he seated himself at the table, Mrs. Morton rose and sauntered to the window, where, over the outspread black wings and gilded chain of the tavern sign, she looked down on the passers-by.

"Robin," said Mr. Francis at last, and hesitatingly, "I have something important to say to you. It concerns you most, but what concerns you must also concern your nearest relation, your sister. Shall I speak before her and your brother-in-law?"

Captain Robin smiled unsuspectingly.

"I have no crime on my soul," he said. "Morton, can you keep a secret? Clara, are you ready to listen?"

Clara instantly thought of that obnoxious "person" at Clack: she had no wish to hear about him.

"I don't wish to know anything concerning people of whom I never speak," she said; "but if it really only refers to you personally, of course I am ready to hear."

"It principally concerns Robin," Mr. Shrugg said.

"Tell you what," said Mr. Morton, rising; "I'll go down and pick up more news about Kingfisher. Always interested in your affairs, my dear fellow; but I don't want to burden my conscience with your secrets, you know."

"Nonsense," said the captain. "Speak out, cousin;" and Mr. Morton re-seated himself.

Mr. Shrugg drew a little packet of papers out of his breast pocket; and Clara, seeing it was likely to be a long story, sank into a chair, and resumed her study of the passers-by.

"Coming here," Mr. Shrugg began, as he

unfolded some scraps of paper, "I made a few notes of what I have to say, that my meaning should not be distracted by any circumstances that might arise, but be connected and to the point. First, then, you know, you left Norah finishing the packing away of your poor mother's things yesterday."

"Yes," said the captain.

"In the very last drawer she opened," resumed his cousin, "under some old gowns, was a little box,—a common little box, without lock or any fastening. It had been sealed, but the wax had long been worthless, and fell away as Norah lifted the box. In it were some little articles used in ladies' work, and this parchment."

And he raised the discoloured roll, but kept it unopened in his hand; then looked back at his notes, and continued.

"You gave my wife permission carefully to look at anything and everything before removing it to the boxes; and in your presence

my wife gave the like authority to Norah, when her bad headache obliged her to leave the child to finish alone. You had previously said you had all your mother's papers already in your own possession. Norah, therefore, had no hesitation in opening this, as it bore no address, and as she naturally supposed it to be, like most of the other contents of the drawers, merely a relic of your own or your sister's childhood. But it was not so. It was, it is, in fact, an important document; and as soon as she saw what it was, she, after hearing you were out of reach, ran home with it, missing me on the way to meet her; and as I was not back till nine o'clock, I could do nothing till late. As soon as I knew, I rode off to Shrugg, and then found you had come here."

Captain Robin interrupted him, and held out his hand.

"I can guess what it is," he said. It is a pity my cousin read it. Clara, you can guess?"

"Yes," she said; "I suppose so. I do not

wish to hear it. You had better look it over, and then burn it."

But Mr. Shrugg kept possession of the little packet.

"What do you suppose it to be?" he asked with surprise.

"My poor mother's confession," Robin whispered.

"No such thing," was the answer. "No such thing," he repeated. "Now, Robin," he continued, with solemnity, "I have come myself to tell you, as a relation, and as one gentleman to another would come,—without legal witness, —to tell you, as I would myself be told, under like circumstances, as quickly as possible, and, I hope, as kindly as possible,—that this parchment is a valid instrument, properly drawn, witnessed, and stamped,—the *last* will of my grandfather, disposing of his property differently to that will by which your father was the heir."

"Oh, nonsense!" said the captain, pushing

his fair hair off his forehead, as if to clear his brain from the horrible impression made by these words. "Oh, nonsense!"

"Then, I suppose you are the fortunate heir," sneered Mrs. Morton, addressing Mr. Shrugg for the first time.

"No," he answered, "I am not. But now here are your poor mother's reasons for keeping this out of sight. Shall I read them?"

"But," Captain Robin cried, and his trembling voice showed how much he was disturbed, "how do you know that the will, or whatever is there, is legal?"

"It is not likely I should come and upset you on mere vague speculation, Robin," Mr. Shrugg said. "As soon as I had read it, I took it in to let Clark see, of course binding him first to secrecy. But even if your poor mother's written statement had not proved its originality, Mr. Clark says it would prove itself; it is as valid as any will can be."

"Let us hear it," said Robin.

Mrs. Morton had risen, and now stood by the table.

"*I* don't believe a word of it," she said.

Mr. Shrugg took no notice. Her words were mere sounds to him just then; he was too seriously absorbed in his own and his young cousin's affairs.

"But first," said he, "I will read your mother's reasons for keeping it back. You recognise her writing. Will you read what she says, or shall I?"

Robin looked, and recognised the writing, faded though it was; then he pushed it back, "No," he said, huskily; "you read it,—read everything. Morton, are you bored?"

"Bored, by Jove! Old fellow, how you talk! Never mind, old boy; it'll all come right."

Captain Shrugg clasped his hands behind his head, and in that attitude listened while Mr. Francis read aloud, as follows:—

"I, Gertrude Shrugg, took this will out of my grandfather's, or rather my husband's

grandfather's, desk, the day he died. I knew the contents of his former will were in favour of my husband, and therefore of my dearest son, Robin. The old squire was my best friend; he never treated me basely, as the man called my husband did. During the last few years of his life, the squire seemed to long after his eldest grandson, Francis, and I had strong suspicions he meant to reinstate him in his favour. He used to throw out hints to me about Robert making too sure,—taking too much upon himself; and once he asked me exactly what his private means were, independent of the allowance he made him. All this raised my suspicions, and I had the good luck to discover this will, cutting out my darling from the remotest chance of his birthright, before my husband could arrive from London. I let the former will be brought forward, and I kept this secure. I will not destroy it lest my Robin should die. Then I would bring it forth, and have my just revenge for all the

insults heaped upon me by that vile man. If not, I pray God to let me live to see my boy stand in his father's place; and after that happy sight I will burn this to ashes. I write this lest accident should shorten my days suddenly before my husband's death, before my bonny boy gains his right; in which case my Robin will no doubt find it, and see how his mother loved him. Burn it, my son, if your father acts rightly by you; but if he marries again, or plays you false for your false sister's sake, bring this will forward; at least his wished will can be set aside, and we should be revenged after all. But I know I shall live—live all the shame and insult down, and triumph over that man."

Then followed her name, and that of her old maid, Martin, as witness, and the date—six months after the old squire's death.

Clara's voice, full of storm, broke the silence that followed:—"Then our mother was a thief as well as a—"

"Stop!" Captain Robin cried, starting up and confronting her.

"How dare you! she is dead."

Mr. Morton looked on and smilingly nodded his head, as if he would have said, "That's right; give it her strong."

"It's all very fine," Clara continued, shrugging her shoulders, "and if you like to be cheated, you can, of course; but I still consider the whole thing a take in."

Then Mr. Shrugg seemed to become conscious of her insolence.

"What would you have me to do?" he said, looking full at her: "suppress the whole thing?"

"Who does that paper pretend to make the heir?" she asked in return.

"I came here to your brother," he answered calmly; "when he desires, I will read the will."

She turned away impatiently, and Captain Robin spoke. "That is my poor mother's

writing," he said; "there's no doubt about that. She did wrong in hiding it, of course, but she did it all for my sake, poor thing!" he added, as if apologetically to his brother-in-law.

Indeed, incapable though the little man yet was of fully comprehending all the points of the case, he was quite aware that this was no scene for a stranger to witness, and became nervously afraid of his sister's indelicate violence.

Mr. Morton was a kind-hearted, easy-going man of fashion: nothing surprised him, and, to say the truth, nothing scandalized him.

"All right," he said; "but let us hear more."

Mr. Francis was more agitated than any of them as he began to read the will. He alone could fancy the old man expressing his wishes, could understand the workings of his mind, as he brooded over it, and could vividly picture the face that had once reflected only the deepest affection for him, bending over the very parchment that had so miraculously come to light. But how could any of these young

people give Mr. Francis credit for any but worldly, exulting feelings? It ran in the usual formula, stating the testator to be in sound mind, and affirming that he revoked all former wills and testaments, etc., etc., etc.

"The estate of Shrugg, with its mansion-house, park, timber, farms, out-dwellings of all kinds, pastures, streams, etc., etc., I give and bequeath to the youngest child, whether male or female, of my grandson, Francis Shrugg, who shall be the youngest at the time of my decease; to be held in trust by the said Francis Shrugg for the said child during the life of the said Francis Shrugg, with the proviso that the said child of the said Francis Shrugg, shall, whether male or female, retain the surname of Shrugg. And as I hope to be forgiven by my Saviour, so do I forgive all seeming disobedience received by me from the said Francis Shrugg, in token of which my forgiveness, I revoke all other wills made against his interest. To my grandson, Robert

Shrugg, I give and bequeath my house in Brook Street, London, with its furniture as it stands at the time of my decease; and to the son of my said grandson, Robert Shrugg, to my great-grandson Robin Shrugg, I give and bequeath my manor of Scarton, in Lincolnshire, with its farms and farming-stock, as it stands at the time of my decease."

So far according to the wording. Then there followed the bequest to Mr. Theodore, as in the former will; a handsome legacy to Mrs. Robert; legacies to old servants, and to certain charities in Clack, Nunbriar, and Scarton, and the usual formula at the end.

The little captain sat erect the whole time. The veins on his fair temple stood out like cords as he listened to the passing away of all the riches he had prized so dearly; little by little he was becoming aware of how much was going from him, and how much more might be required at his hands. The very fortune he had inherited from his mother might be

claimed to pay up back dues; the very sale of his commission might be necessary. He had not lived so many years in the world not to know all that this imported, neither was he without the natural acuteness of his county. Gradually, but surely, he saw the depth of the chasm yawning beneath the road that but an hour ago had seemed so sure and smooth,—saw all the liabilities incurred by his mother's rash and desperate act; and, above all, saw the hateful additional scandal to be heaped thereby on that unfortunate mother's already sufficiently vituperated memory.

However, he spoke up bravely when his cousin ceased reading.

"It's a very serious business," he said. "You and I had better go up to town to-day; and,—now mind I'm not doubting you, Mr. Francis,—and lay that before my lawyer. You know I can't give up so much without a struggle."

"You'll never contest it?" said Mr. Francis.

"No, I'm afraid it would do no good; but to clear away all possible doubt."

"Quite right," Mr. Shrugg exclaimed. "We'll go up to day. I do wish all doubts to be thoroughly cleared. I would not owe even this great gift to what would not bear thorough investigation."

Clara sneered, but she was too overpowered to speak.

"Oh, I wouldn't be particular as long as I came in for a windfall such as that, anyhow," Mr. Morton laughingly exclaimed. "But it's all ugly business for you, Shrugg, my boy. But won't you stay for the races? And I say, Mr. Shrugg, you are the heir by that will, ain't you?"

"No," said Mr. Francis; "my youngest daughter is; but I virtually hold the property for my life. I can understand why it is so left. The old man never completely forgave any one. He said he never would forgive my marriage; and I believed him. He would

keep his word in part, and this is his way of doing it."

"Your youngest daughter?" Clara said, finding her voice again. "Is that the young lady I saw in town, Robert?" She never called him Robin, it was so vulgar.

Robin did not seem to hear her; and Mr. Shrugg, not being addressed, took no notice.

"Well," said Clara, rising, "it's no good losing all the day. Will you order some sort of conveyance to take me to the Museum Gardens, Arthur? the streets are too hot for walking. Robert, let me hear how all this nonsense ends, as soon as possible."

Then she kissed her brother lightly on his forehead and left the room, after a slight bow to Mr. Shrugg.

"Which of the young ladies will take it then, if"—Captain Shrugg could not add, "if this is true:" he already felt it was true, and that he was an usurper; so he said, —"if this turns out to be the last will?"

"Norah. She was a few months old when he died."

"By Jove!" said the captain, thinking how she had tired herself over his mother's clothes, and required his leave to touch them, only yesterday; and then the little man felt glad he had thought of ordering the food and cream she liked. And mingled with these petty thoughts came more irritating ones, of how he was to go back into the world again, despoiled of all for which the world would have prized him.

Mr. Morton tried again to make the best of it.

"There may be another will turn up, you know," he said. "Queer old fellow, that grandfather of yours; guess he's hid 'em broadcast over the place. Oh, but he hadn't hid that, though,—I forgot. But look here, Shrugg; you'll come in for the town house. I envy you, that my boy. Good cellar and pictures there, ain't there? And the plate, that's worth something!"

"That goes with Shrugg Park," said Robin.

"Besides, I wouldn't melt that, Morton, if I could: that would be too Israelitish, eh?"

Mr. Morton laughed. "Well then, what's that manor in Lincolnshire? Picking in that, isn't there?"

Robin shook his head. "A few hundreds; no more," he said.

"Better than Clack dower house, Robin," his cousin interposed; "and your mother took care of you, remember."

"Very true," Robin said, moodily.

"Ah! to be sure," Mr. Morton cried. "I swear you're not to be pitied so much, my boy. You're better off than I am now, because you ain't a family man, you know."

Neither of the young men seemed to see all these words inferred.

Mr. Shrugg rose. "Now, Robin," he said, "I'm going to order some luncheon. Come and have some; and then we'd better start. We have plenty of time to catch the two o'clock express."

How naturally Mr. Shrugg stepped out of poverty back into the lordly self-confidence of possession. Not that he had ever been mean or abjectly humble, neither was it his nature in the days of his utmost prosperity to be self-asserting: yet a marked difference was perceptible in his manner and bearing as lord of Shrugg, to what they were in his position as a moneyless tradesman in Clack High Street. Robin saw the change without thinking on it, and unconsciously admired it.

The journey to town was a silent one. They parted at the London station,—Robin to go to Brook Street, Mr. Shrugg to his old friend, Mr. Sims. They were to meet again early the next morning in the presence of the family lawyer.

Mr. Shrugg jumped into a hansom, and bade the man drive fast to Sussex Gardens. How long was it since he had dared to incur such an expense; he felt like a boy starting on his own account after leaving school. Out

of sight of poor Captain Robin, he could give way to his real feeling of thankfulness; and now the solemn freshness of the great change in his prospects was a little over, he encouraged himself to rejoice entirely.

In taking possession of the estate in Norah's name, he need feel no regret. Captain Robin was better off than the majority of young men, even yet; he had a good position in the army too; and had not had time to incur expenses beyond the limits of his present income. Why should not Mr. Shrugg rejoice then?—and he did, as he was swiftly driven onward, rejoice unfeignedly that the grievous yoke of poverty was lifted from all his dear ones; and that, like Job's, his last days were likely to be better than his beginning.

"Papa!" Margaret almost screamed, as he entered the drawing-room, where she was sitting with Mr. and Mrs. Sims.

"Well, my dear!" he said, kissing her. "I wonder if you can give me a bed, my good

old friends?" he added, as he greeted the others. "A little business unexpectedly brought me up, and I thought I might come and see if you'd take me in, before going to a hotel."

Margaret thought he need not have put the question in that way to people who knew his circumstances so well. As if he could afford a hotel bill!

"Are they all well at home, papa?" she asked.

"Yes," he answered; "let me look at you. Ah, Maggy! even Susy looks rosier than you. You want change, love."

"Any news at Clack?" Margaret continued.

"None whatever of our poor friends at The Chase, if you mean that news," he said.

"And dear Susy is nominated to the hospital? Ah, poor dear child!" Mrs. Sims said.

"Yes," he replied; "but I shan't let her go. I must try those baths in Bohemia, Murkitroyd

recommends. A trip abroad will do them all good, poor things."

"But how can she travel?" Margaret cried, almost indignantly, thinking of the empty purse at home.

"Oh! money smooths all roads," he said.

Margaret bent forward. "Papa!" she exclaimed, "is she going to have Mr. Murkitroyd, after all?"

"No, certainly not; we must try and take her as carefully as he would have done. We can journey very slowly, and stop at the principal towns where there are English doctors. I think we shall manage it after a bit."

Margaret began to fear her father's troubles had overthrown his reason; she went near to him, so as to see him better.

"I can't hear of a situation, papa," she said, "and Mrs. Sims has kindly asked me to go with her to Brighton. But what are you going to do?"

"Not let you run wild any more," he said, by this time laughing. "Mrs. Sims must be tired of you. Sims, if you are really going to the sea-side, I wish you'd let me the house for a month. I want to bring my family up to town till I settle things more. You know my wife will take care of the furniture, and we won't quarrel over terms."

Mr. Sims laughed at the joke, though he thought it was in rather questionable taste; but Margaret was seriously alarmed, she knew her father was not given to such wild talk.

"Papa must be tired," she said, hurriedly; "may I see about a room for him, Mrs. Sims?"

"No, dear; it's all ready. You know we expected our cousin to stop last night, so all was prepared for her."

"Well," Mr. Shrugg continued; "come, Sims, won't you bargain? Seriously, I mean it; this is just the size of our former house, we know how to fit in, don't we, Maggy."

"We don't like to let our house," Mr. Sims

said, a little coldly; "but, of course, as a matter of convenience to old friends, we would lend it to you if you wish."

Mrs. Sims said nothing.

"Papa, dear!" Margaret put in, eagerly, "don't you think we had better take lodgings?"

"No, I don't," he said; "I hate lodgings. By the bye, Maggy, your funds must be running low; mind you ask me for some money before I leave. I suppose you've been investing in all sorts of extravagant finery, eh?" Then he suddenly changed his tone, and drew her to his knee. "It is a shame to tease you, poor child!" he said slowly; "but Margaret, dear, I am poor no longer. Another will has been found, and Norah is heiress of Shrugg Park."

No one thought of the time as they sat talking of this wondrous change; it was almost daybreak when they had heard and exclaimed enough. Mr. Sims—whose legal opinion was held in high esteem—said, as Mr. Clark, the

Clack lawyer had said, the will was firm and valid for all intents and purposes. It was a bad look-out for Captain Robin. All back dues might be claimed for the seventeen years past. Captain Robin might, if his cousins so chose, be left without a stiver.

"But that," said Mr. Francis, "is not likely. We will take nothing from Robin. What I will take shall be the gift of my grandfather. Norah and I will have no uncousinly grasping. We are too thankful for what we can take conscientiously."

"Who are these witnesses to the will?" Mr. Sims inquired, after nearly shaking his old friend's hand off in his congratulations.

"Both died before my grandfather," said Mr. Shrugg.

"And poor Loftus, I knew well," Mr. Sims continued. "It's a pity he went off so suddenly. He'd have kicked up a row, I know. But that woman—Mrs. Robert—must have been mad."

"Let her rest—let her rest," Mr. Shrugg exclaimed.

"And now," cried Mrs. Sims, "and now Mr. Shrugg, as you are a rich man, I don't mind telling you I can't let my house to anybody. Come and stay while we are here, and welcome; but let the house, no. Why, that dear child, Nelly, would be playing ball amongst bits of china, and wearing holes in my carpets by skipping."

Mr. Shrugg laughed.

"I couldn't resist frightening you all, but it was very childish," he said. "Margaret thought I'd gone mad."

"But what did Norah say? Such a noble girl, so clever she always was," said kindly Mrs. Sims.

"Poor Norah! when I got home I found her dreadfully excited. She persisted in Susy keeping the will. I really don't think the girl had any idea beyond Susy at first. She fancies she caused Susy's illness; and in finding the will

she believes she found Susy's cure. Of course her high-flown, enthusiastic, excited manner threw Susy into hysterics; but they'd all calmed down when I left home this morning, and were pitying Robin with all their might. They used to laugh at him a little; but now it's all, 'Poor dear Robin!'"

And so it was. In Bell's letter telling her twin sister of what had happened, "Poor Robin" was mentioned repeatedly, his little kindnesses extolled and magnified, his smart speeches shown up as real wittinesses, and the little man spoken of altogether as we speak of the dead,—forgetful of their failings, and only mindful of their virtues. Mr. Frederick Lington's name had no mention in this letter; indeed Bell spoke of having waltzed round the large sitting-room with Norah, in the "joy of her heart;" which expression cannot be said to be appropriate if that organ were still seared and blighted.

"We have written to poor Robin," Bell

added, "now there is not the slightest chance of the invalidity of the will. I wrote it, and Susy and I and Norah signed it,—quite an official-looking document it was. We told him we hoped there would be no stoppage to our friendship; and that though we could not say we were not glad of the great change on our own account, we much wished it could have been made without any difference to him. I will tell you what his answer is in my next."

Captain Shrugg read this cousinly letter in the spirit it deserved. He recognised Bell's writing, and was comforted by the thought she had prompted the wording also. His own sister's indifference to his trial had not surprised him, neither did it grieve him; but this unlooked-for sympathy pleased him much, and his answer was cordial and grateful. But he lamented sorely he had not established a deeper and surer claim while he could have treated as a prince. There was another drop

of balm for him, during this season of what was to him real humiliation. Mr. Theodore wrote, offering to lend him some money, and to wait for payment any number of years. Mr. Theodore had not many hundreds at his disposal, and how he had saved so much out of his small means amazed the fashionable officer. The language of his letter was outrageously flowery, there was scarcely a word of less than four syllables in it; indeed, it required some ingenuity to get at its real meaning. Captain Robin laughed over it, even as he recognised the kindly intention. He could not know how his brother had cried over its composition, late at night, sitting up in the little parlour Mrs. and Miss Clacker had vacated. He knew nothing of the reverential regard entertained for him deep in Mr. Theodore's almost womanly heart.

However, he wrote a suitable reply, and made himself sign it—"Your affectionate brother."

This letter was to Mr. Theodore what the Pope's tokens are to the poor Roman peasants. He showed it confidentially to a few choice friends. Miss Clacker wept admiring tears over it, and then he placed it with a fragrant sachet in his collar drawer, and feasted his eyes upon it whenever he took out a clean handkerchief.

The heiress herself was an object of great awe and respect at Clack. Miss Crocodilla spoke in her most mellifluent accents the first time she saw that young lady, as to a new and superior acquaintance; and it was a matter of much discussion in Clack tea-circles, whether Norah should not be addressed for the future as Miss Shrugg, irrespective of her elder sisters.

People were amazed to hear from Sarah—who found her society much courted by her neighbours at this time—that Norah continued to be treated as one of the children still, and that she pursued her domestic duties just as regularly as before.

"She always did put in her spoke, and fussy about, more than all t' rest," said Sarah; "but i'stead of being wuss now, I thing she's more humble like."

Sarah's criticism was true. Instead of being puffed up, Norah was sobered. A great weight had been lifted off the person she loved most in the world,—her father; and the drag upon her own conscience, Susy's accident, caused by her carelessness, was lessened, and might be entirely removed through her means.

Norah's thoughts went beyond the worldly advantages accruing to herself through this turn of fortune, and recognised in it, not luck, nor fate,—but Almighty mercy.

Such an event as this could not take place without causing much interest, not only locally but generally. Neither could it be settled all at once, even though the principal parties concerned were amicably disposed towards each other.

The cause had to be publicly pleaded,

publicly sworn, publicly determined. The lawyers had to be satisfied as well as their employers.

It happened at a dead time of year, too, —the close of the London season,—and was therefore less able to escape notoriety.

Captain Shrugg, however, got off better than he had expected. He had to give up his sceptre; but like many another reigning monarch, he had already discovered there were thorns amongst the roses, and he could step off his pedestal and be still what is called comfortably off.' He met with much kindness from his grand friends too.

Mr. Murkitroyd heard the news, of course, but he kept back his congratulations till one of the family had personally communicated with him. For a week he waited, getting gloomy and bitter as the posts passed by without bringing the looked-for letter.

Was it possible these people were, like all the rest of the world, after all, forgetful of old

friends as soon as prosperity returned? Then, too, he thought angrily of his offer to Susy. What a fool he must have seemed to her and her sisters. How they would all, perhaps, now rejoice she had refused him. His very latest offering at her shrine—that gift to the hospital—was not to benefit her, after all. Of course now she needed no charity; and though he could and did honestly rejoice with them all, he also regretted he could no longer show his friendship for them substantially.

After all, their prospects were not so dazzling in the eyes of this rich millionaire as they appeared to the Clackites. Mr. Murkitroyd could have bought up Shrugg, and experienced no diminution of income by doing so; but he was conscious that, notwithstanding his superior riches, society placed a gulf between their several positions. Mr. Shrugg, of Shrugg Park, with not one quarter of the possessions of "Murkitroyd & Son, Manufacturers, Leeds," might, if he chose, go where the tradesman

would not be tolerated. The ex-doctor shook his head and "gloomed," but his unjust suspicions were soon set at rest.

"My dear Murkitroyd," wrote the new squire,—

"I am still 'keeping shop,' notwithstanding my changed position, with the news of which Mr. Theodore tells me he has acquainted you. You would have been one of the first to hear of it direct from us, had we not been all somewhat upset. My time has been, still is, and will be for long, taken up with law matters, and I have not had a moment's leisure until to-day—Sunday,—which leisure I devote to you.

"Under existing circumstances it will be convenient for us to remain here a week or two longer; and I want you to tell your young friend,—my successor here, that he cannot have possession till the end of the month. I must also decline taking payment for the stock and

goodwill, and shall only be too happy to let any friend of yours have it on much easier terms.

"The rent of the house and shop will therefore be £30 a year, and I will give the stock in; the new still, etc., I reserve for my own use elsewhere. I return your friend a cheque for the sum already paid by him, £275.

"I hope to move my family to town in a week's time from the present. Captain Shrugg has let the Brook Street house to me; address to me there. We hope to get away from England before the winter, but law is very tedious work. However, I shall, if I myself am unable to be absent long, take my family to Swalbach, and leave them there while I come back again; unless you recommend different baths to begin with.

"My daughter Susan seems certainly better. I shall of course call in Doctor Cureat as soon as we reach London.

"And now, my dear Murkitroyd, let me tell you our gratitude to you for all your great

kindness will never cease; and we shall look forward to receiving you at Shrugg, when we are able to return and settle there, as one of the greatest pleasures and honours of our new position. Time will, I trust, obliterate any memories but what are wholly pleasing; but will never obliterate our warm sense of your great services to us," etc., etc., etc.

The ex-doctor's whole face brightened over this. He ought to have known these people better than to suspect them of ingratitude. He could not bear the idea of not seeing them all again; all, at least, except Susy,—her he could not face yet,—before they went abroad. So without warning he started off to Clack one fine day, and popped into Mrs. Clacker's little parlour, as if he only came in from his own house in the next street as formerly.

"I knew we should see some one," cried Crocodilla, when the first greetings were over. "Mother dreamt of father, last night, and they say, 'dream of the dead, and you are sure to hear of the living.'"

Of course they talked of all that had happened, also of handsome Johnny Dale's untimely fate.

"The poor parents are still in the glowing East," said Mr. Theodore. "No news of the poor young gentleman yet; and fair Diana,—chaste Diana, has left her wonted orbit, and droops in distant spheres."

"What! has she gone too?" cried Mr. Murkitroyd.

"Yes, sir; but only to the great metropolis,—no farther."

"Oh, Theodore! you are too poetical for ordinary comprehension. If you don't take care, you'll get made Poet Laureate, or something equally dreadful."

"Just what I think, sir,—that's what his genius ought to bring him," Miss Crocky exclaimed. "He is so talented."

"Miss Susan is so much better," he was told. "She goes out every day in Mrs. Francis Shrugg's pheyaton,—she's just gone

with her ma? What a pity you hadn't come a few minutes sooner!"

Perhaps he was of a contrary opinion, for he started up directly he heard this, and went in next door.

Bell, Norah, and Nelly, were busy all over the house.

No one was in the sitting-room, so he went on the landing, and shouted,—

"Anybody at home?"

"That's Esculapius," cried Norah, recognising his voice; and down she ran.

"Now, then," he cried, seeing her impetuous descent. "You want to lame yourself, do you? I never saw an heiress before, but I always supposed they were well-conducted young ladies."

Both Norah's hands were given to his.

"I meant to write, and say good-bye," she said, meeting him with all the cordiality of a child. "I didn't know whether you would like to come, but she's out," she added, with a knowing nod towards the sofa.

He smiled. "And she's really mending?" he asked.

"Her spirits are, for she's so thankful,—we are all so thankful. But I don't think her back is any stronger, really," she replied; "but that thing you recommended is such a help."

"And you are all going right away," he added. "You are all too grand for us now,—especially you. Well, I never thought you were to be such a swell,—Miss Shrugg, of Shrugg, isn't it? I suppose you'll go and get polished, and then make a swell match, eh?"

He watched her curiously, with an amused smile.

"Now, don't be silly," she cried; "and you are very rude to suppose I need polishing; and of course I shan't marry,—I shall have to keep house for them all at Shrugg. Poor Susy, you know, will never forget William; and Margaret,—oh, I forgot," she cried, with a deep blush.

"Oh, I guess all about that," he said; "but

don't you believe in such nonsense as broken hearts, Miss Norah."

She looked back at him, and he rightly interpreted the expression of her face.

"You think I ought not to talk so? Well, I ought not," he said; "but I am trying my best to be sensible, little woman, and when you come back to Shrugg, I hope I shall be able to come and see you all."

"I told papa my suspicions about 'Walker,'" she went on, "and do you know, he never dreamed of such a thing; but he thinks as I do now."

"Just as I expected. I knew you were a woman, and incapable of keeping a secret."

"You are not angry?"

"No; I dare not be angry with so great a personage as you. Where's Miss Bell? I can't stand the honour and glory of this interview any longer. I don't know how heiresses ought to be addressed."

"You are very unkind," she retorted with a

air of womanly dignity that was exceedingly becoming, and she turned away and called her sisters.

"How long is it since I saw you?" he asked, suddenly, while they were all sitting talking together.

"Ten weeks; I put it down in my diary when you left," Norah answered.

"Chrónicle of small beer," Mr. Murkitroyd said; but he thought afterwards she had changed in that short time immensely.

"I always thought she'd be handsome when she filled out," he said to himself. "Her eyes are wonderfully intelligent, and her figure will rival Margaret's, but she's sure to be spoilt. I never knew a rich woman worth anything."

CHAPTER XXI.

FROM ALEXANDRIA TO ADEN.

MR. SETON found his wife's health sufficiently re-established to allow of her return to her native country the very next week after he had seen the announcement of his sister's marriage. The change in his father-in-law's position hastened their movements.

"It would be a proper attention," he said, on hearing of the Shruggs' arrival in Brook Street, "for Linda to be in Hyde Park Gardens, to receive them there."

He persuaded himself that he had long wished to see Mr. and Mrs. Shrugg in his own house, and he talked eloquently on the certainty of honourable and disinterested conduct meeting its reward sooner or later. Whether he alluded to himself or his father-in-law, he did

not say; and Linda took the wisest view, and believed he meant her father's.

What a happy month they all spent together, re-united again! Though London was given up to painters, and for a fashionable person to be seen in its streets, was certain death to his pretensions as one of the upper ten thousand, Mr. Seton was quite genial. His trip through France had done him much good; the idle life and the discomforts of travelling seemed to have unbent him physically as well as mentally.

There was another reason for his geniality also, for it was believed the name of Seton was likely to be perpetuated in the direct line. But of this Mr. Seton said nothing, he only guarded poor Linda from the possibility of fatigue more sedulously than ever; and though his eyes twinkled pleasantly occasionally, and he even condescended to joke with Norah about her grand expectations (that is to say, when they were strictly a family party), he never by word

of mouth spoke of his pleasant anticipations even to his mother-in-law.

As Norah had told Mr. Murkitroyd, Susy's spirits were better, but she did not really regain strength; yet she shared in all that passed around her, carefully avoiding putting forward her sufferings lest the family joy should be affected.

Margaret was the real cloud over that family joy. She was about amongst them all, busy as the busiest; her voice and music might be heard by passers, sonorous and strong and beautiful; but in her eyes, and the rigid lines of her perfectly colourless face, was a terrible story written.

Hers was a nature that retreated into itself when deep emotions were aroused. She could not "tell and be better."

In one of the dressing-rooms in the Brook Street house, was an old-fashioned print of Mrs. Siddons in the character of Queen Catherine in her interview with Wolsey. Norah bade

her father look at it, and see who it reminded him of.

Mr. Shrugg started.

"Ah, poor Margaret!" he exclaimed. "Ah! she will be better when we are in fresh scenes," he added, hopefully; but observant Norah shrewdly guessed that places, times, and seasons to Margaret were all alike.

They remained in town till the end of September, when Mr. Shrugg found he might take his family away, and return before his lawyer required his next signature. Captain Shrugg came to bid them good-bye,—came to his own house for the first time since they had occupied it; and during the evening a wholly unintended explanation with Bell took place.

The room was too warm for Bell,—she must needs sit on the balcony amongst the flowers. It reminded her of dear old Clack, she said,—as if Clack was endeared to her memory. So she sat on the window-sill almost even with the floor, her blue draperies spreading round her.

The captain jumped over this drapery, and stood out on the balcony looking down at her.

"Cousin Bell, you look, with your brown hair done that fashion round your head, like a goddess I have seen painted on a ceiling somewhere: your gown and the white curtains behind you represent the sky in which she was seated."

"Cousin Robin, don't be sarcastical!"

"Why can't you believe a fellow, Cousin Bell?"

"Well, I'll believe you for once, as you are going away, and so am I. I once saw a goddess on a ceiling, and she was the most hideous pug-nosed creature I ever saw; and I got a pain in my neck and eyes with looking at her."

"No one would have a pain in their eyes looking at you," the captain said, lowering his voice, as there was a pause in the hum of voices inside the room.

Bell looked up at him with a laugh, and

saw something in his eyes that made her withdraw hers quickly. Then the little man spoke. Perhaps he made his story good,—that is no uncommon failing amongst others than lovers, is it? However, as he told it, it appeared he had hoped to have had a better position than he had then to have offered her, and that the proudest thought of his life was to have made her mistress of Shrugg. He spoke very well,—most of us are eloquent in our own causes; and Bell's heart seemed to be springing towards him as no dead or withered heart could have done on so short a notice. He spoke the truth, though, when he assured her he had meant to keep silence till his affairs were arranged, and he could tell exactly the extent of his belongings, but the idea of parting had put prudent intentions to flight.

Bell listened, and pulled a beautiful plant of verbena to pieces in her abstraction; but she could not and did not respond warmly to his addresses. The girl was true to her creed.

Dead hearts could not bloom afresh at a moment's notice.' She answered honestly she only liked him very much,—not enough she was sure to make her marry him. He had better join his regiment in Ireland and think it over, and she would go to Germany and do the same. She could promise him she would never care for any one else, though she might never care enough for him. She would write to him in a cousinly way, and she hoped he would write in the same way to her; and other bargain than this she would not and did not make.

But the captain insisted on speaking to her father.

"I won't seem to do anything mean," he said, really forgetting he had ever indulged in something very like meanness not so very long ago.

Mr. Shrugg was pleased with his frankness, but would allow of no engagement. They might write to each other, he said, and if at the

end of a year, when Bell would have attained the mature age of twenty, and the captain obtained his expected majority and decided upon his future career, they found their minds unaltered, he would consent to their marriage.

Mr. Shrugg had ceased to wonder at his daughters' love affairs now; but he did express his surprise to his wife that any one could think of Bell as a suitable wife, and how any girl could fancy Robin as a suitable husband!

Relations are not always the most favourable critics!

There came a letter to Margaret from Mrs. Dale the next morning, dated Southampton.

She and Mr. Dale had been both so ill in Alexandria, she wrote, that to save their lives they had been compelled to leave it. She had not given up all hope yet, she never would till her dying day; but all hope of finding John in Alexandria she had abandoned. They had returned to England, leaving the Scotts to carry on the search; but they meant to return

in the winter. Would Margaret take pity on them, and come to them. She was very dear to them, not only on her own, but on their boy's account.

Margaret's heart responded to this summons, and her parents could not resist the appeal. So Margaret let her family start for Germany without her, and remained behind with her sorrowing friends.

She found Mrs. Dale's words were literally true. She had barely escaped the pestilential climate with her life. A dreary journey had the three to Dale, and a sad coming home it was. Mr. Dale spoke not a word as he passed through his assembled servants, but avoiding their pitying gaze, he hurried into his library. Mrs. Dale burst out crying; and Margaret, who could show no grief in tears and sobs, felt there was a deeper sorrow than the sorrow for those who lie dead before us.

The autumn winds came earlier and stormier than usual that year; the ceaseless rain came

down with soughing violence, beating down the beautiful branches, changing the luxuriant creepers into masses of rotten vegetation. Darkness and sadness brooded over all, and the constant state of anxiety and expectation in which they lived made the outer gloom seem worse than it was. Every ring at the door bells, every louder sound than the usual domestic sounds, every post that came in, every hasty step on the tender walk, made their hearts and pulses leap. John's room was kept ready as if any moment might bring him to it. His guns and fishing rods, his whips and sticks, were collected and kept under his father's eyes in the library. His dogs were petted and allowed to come and go in and out of the house as they would; the horses he had ridden were fed by the squire's hand every day; the modern whims about the kennels and stables, at which the father had once laughed as "Johnny's follies," were now carefully followed.

"Mr. John will like such and such a thing

to be done," or, "Mr. John won't like to find that," were constantly said by Mr. Dale, as if John was merely absent for a few days.

Of him to Margaret Mr. Dale never spoke, nor did he ever discuss his anxiety with her or before her. Had she been his boy's wife he could not have treated her more kindly or deferentially; but the girl's altered looks were to him a reproach that put between them a barrier of reserve.

It was a wretched life for Margaret, yet she was thankful to be at Dale, where so much mutely told her of her lover's presence. His hats in the hall, his dogs, his books with his bold scribbling notes,—all and everything reminded her of him. It was torture to her to be there, and it would be death to her to be elsewhere. So the bleak winds roughened and heightened, and autumn changed into winter, and yet they hoped on against hope.

Every day, directly after breakfast, the two ladies went into Mrs. Dale's morning room to

read the service together. The elder would lean back in an easy-chair before the fire; while Margaret sitting at her feet, her head leaning against her friend's lap, read aloud. The eyes of both would continually be raised above the chimney-piece, where hung six or seven portraits of the absent son, collected from all parts of the house, that his mother might know they were safe in her sight. Johnny, with round staring eyes and mottled arms, and a coral and bells dangling to his baby waist. Johnny playing with a hoop, in his best black velvet frock, and a profuse crop of ring-like curls above his beaming, rosy face. Johnny, in his first jacket and trowsers, proudly bestriding a wonderfully frisky pony. Master John in stick-up collars, wielding an enormous bat, and defending a wicket with an expression of resolution worthy a better cause. And lastly, Mr. John, a meek-faced Mr. John; then a saucy-faced Mr. John, dashing after the hounds; and then Johnny as he was when last Margaret

saw him, with his beaming smile, his handsome eyes, his well-knit lissom form, his manly independent bearing; and looking oftenest up at this, Margaret would fancy the face changed with the holy words she read, and smiled down upon her, as if bidding her lay them to heart and be comforted.

It was one morning while thus engaged that they heard the sound of wheels drive up over the paved court-yard to the back entrance; and as usual on such occasions, both stopped in their employment and listened nervously. No doubt it was only the carrier, or the tax cart come back with purchases at Nunbriar or Clack for the household; but still it might be something or somebody of more importance. But all their listening was disappointed: they heard nothing more, and with desponding sighs Margaret had just begun to read again when Mr. Dale came in and interrupted her.

"Gertrude!" he said; he was so agitated that he clung to the chair in which his wife sat,

to support himself. "I've got a foreign letter!"

"Yes; from our boy?" she said calmly.

"Yes," he answered.

She sprang up wildly, "You are mocking me!" she cried, in sudden frenzy. "Oh! for God's sake, tell me the truth quickly!"

"He is alive; he is safe," Mr. Dale replied. "See, here is his letter;" and then he gave way, and burst into a passion of weeping terrible to witness.

It was true. There was the well-known writing, and by-and-by Mrs. Dale was sufficiently calm to read his letter aloud. It told a marvellous story. John Dale had been all but killed by his cowardly foes; he had fought to the last, and supposed he had been thrown into the canal as dead, for he was pulled out of the water while still insensible, and humanely sheltered by one of the poorest of the poor pariah Alexandrians who live by begging in the crowded city. This man, through fear of being suspected if he was

found with a European dangerously wounded in his keeping, and also through fear of vengeance at the hands of the unknown enemies who had caused the mischief, should they discover his humanity, kept the sick man so secretly that his hiding-place eluded all the vigilant searching of the police. Johnny got better by slow degrees, but nearly died again from the filth of his surroundings. When he was at last able to get about again, his merciful friend so earnestly entreated him, that John, weak and fearful from his long illness, gave way to his importunity, and consented to leave the city secretly. His clothes had been sold piece by piece, to provide him with food; he had not worn his watch, nor had he any money upon him the night he was assaulted; he had therefore no means of raising funds to enable him to travel suitably. He was totally ignorant that any alarm was raised on his account, for his host was unable to read, and had not dared to make inquiries,

lest he should become an object of surveillance. So dressed in rags, his head bandaged, his feet bare, John Dale hid himself one night under a sack on board a pilgrim's boat bound to Mecca; and being discovered only when the boat was outside the harbour, his assurances of faithful and diligent service were accepted, and he was permitted to work his way along the coast of the Red Sea.

How he lived through it all was always a mystery to him. None but a man born and bred under bluff skies could have stood that fearful journey, following so soon upon his almost mortal sickness; but his days in the saddle, and his tramps through the snows at home, had hardened his frame to withstand as much as human power can withstand; and he survived to struggle on, often in peril of life, often devoured by hunger, often delayed by suffering,—to struggle on, partly by boat, partly along scorching desert tracks, till at last he reached the British settlement at Aden.

But even there his troubles were not ended, neither civil nor military authorities believed his story. 'His haggard form, his matted hair, his rags, his very expostulations, were against his credit.' They said he was a clever impostor, working upon the tragic story with which the newspapers had made them acquainted. Rejected by his own countrymen, he had dragged his skeleton form up to the only shelter the barren rock afforded,—the shade of the few carefully-protected trees round the tanks,—and had slept there where the screaming kites were his sole companions. Then he had lived or rather starved upon the leavings of a compassionate soldier's rations; and it was owing to this man's charity John was able to afford postage for the letter home. A chance Yorkshire phrase had aroused the soldier's sympathy, and discovered they were not only countrymen, but actually neighbours; Nunbriar being the soldier's native place. Unfortunately his character in the regiment

was bad, and his assurances of the poor stranger's identity with the hero of the Alexandrian mystery were not listened to,—it was considered that he and the beggar were in league; and until relief came from home, John wrote that he must remain in actual want of sufficient food. But he was alive, he had not survived so long to die in sight of home!

Happily the Marseilles mail would start the very next day after the receipt of this letter. John's sufferings were not to be unduly protracted. There is no need to enter into the feeling of the two ladies left behind to wait; no need to tell how the father travelled day and night till the curious rock with its vividily tinted, conical peaks was gained. No need to tell how all those incredulous military heroes came forward and excused themselves, and would have given the poor beggar-man their choicest possessions to prove the sincerity of their regret. Mr. Dale himself stared aghast at the first sight he had of his hand-

some son. Gaunt with sickness and famine, aged, and bent with fatigue and hardships, John Dale stood before his father, and almost doubted his own identity as he saw the old man's bewildered stare; but that pause of uncertainty was but for a second.

The best servant master ever had was that compassionate soldier of bad character whose discharge Mr. Dale bought out of gratitude for his charity to his son, and who henceforth spent his life in service at The Chase,—"for charity covereth a multitude of sins."

John's spirits were by no means lowered by all he had undergone. His chaff at the officers, who overwhelmed him with clothes and civilities, hit right and left with unsparing force; not one of them after that but looked twice at a beggar before refusing assistance. He left Aden in triumph, escorted to the ship by a dozen or more newly-made dear friends; his ride down from the bamboo bungalow, by courtesy called the Governor's House, being

a perfect ovation. The sentinels at those huge stone entrances to the citadel, so like the portals of a colossal tomb, utterly bewildered by the throng, presented arms as if to royalty. The dirty Arabs lost their stolid gravity, and joined in the general acclamations. The bronze-haired, black-skinned divers forgot their trade and their incessant cry of "Give us sixpence;" and the sellers of feathers and curiosities saw they were to have no customers, for the general mind was absorbed in hero-worship.

On arriving at Alexandria, Johnny was for going ashore and finding out his preserver; but Mr. Dale was positive on this score, and the son saw he must submit, and remain in safety on board the ship. Captain Scott's friends went on board for news of their lost, but John could give none. He knew nothing of what had happened to his companions in the fray. It may as well be mentioned here, that that unfortunate gentleman never re-appeared; and

still his mother waits and listens for tidings of him in vain. He was a delicate, slight-built man, and no doubt met his death on the spot.

Mrs. Dale insisted on Margaret accompanying her to Dover to meet the travellers. With Margaret by her side the mother felt herself sure of a warm embrace from Johnny, and she remembered his last cold good-bye.

Margaret began to be high and mighty again in her recovered happiness. She said "John's feelings might have changed," she did not wish to go and "claim him without encouragement;" but even while she said this, with head erect as of old, there lay close to her heart that little farewell note that had bade her remember she was his promised wife,—the words of which were now almost obliterated by the constant embrace of its soft hiding-place, but which were engraven in her memory in letters of fire.

And even when John stood once more in the presence of the three he loved best on earth,

and his mother said how, "but for her dear child Margaret," she could not have lived through all her suffering, and as she said so, bade Johnny reward the girl's kindness by the devotion of his life to her, Margaret could not say one word or give one glance warmer than mere friendship. warranted; but by-and-by, when they found themselves alone together, Johnny met with no reserve or pride. Diana's eyes and lips became eloquent and fervent then: her tears and her clinging arms told him all he wished to know. Strangers might still call Margaret proud and cold, but Johnny held a talisman that never through long years of wedded life failed him,—the deep devotion of her unchanging heart.

They were married very quietly from Hyde Park Gardens, and spent their honeymoon with Margaret's family at Nice, where the Shruggs were settled for the winter.

Susy was wonderfully well during that visit of the newly-married couple. She could walk

about the room, and even sit upright for long hours by the sunny shore of the Mediterranean, enjoying the sights and the sounds and brisk idleness around her; but she looked more fragile and girlish, "as if a breath of wind would blow her over," Johnny Dale said, and when he held her hand in hers when bidding her good-bye, he feared to press it, lest he should crush it into nothing.

The mother and daughters remained abroad for more than two years in search of thorough recovery for the invalid, and during that time Major Shrugg claimed and won his wife. When at last they returned to settle down at Shrugg Park, Susy remained behind,—that is the mortal part of sweet Susy Shrugg,—for her gentle spirit was no doubt happy for ever "where it would be."

CHAPTER XXII.

FINALE.

It was summer-time, just such a lovely glowing summer-time as that of three years ago, when the poor chemist from Clack took his daughters to spend a happy day in their rich cousin's park. The golden laburnums, the fragrant lilacs, the bright-stemmed birches were again in all their fresh beauty. On the soft breeze came the scent of cowslips and meadow-sweet from the enamelled meadows knee-deep in flowers and pasture, and the smooth lawn in its velvety richness stretched away to where the pink and white thorn-trees skirted the haw-haw that divided the pleasure ground from the park. All looked now as it had looked then, but how great were the changes!

Norah and Nelly were the only daughters left out of the six who had then exulted in their

cousin's hospitality. For Susy's early death they were in deep mourning yet; but the bitterness of that loss was already over, for she had been so glad to go. Major and Mrs. Shrugg were "following the drum," and playing at camp-life luxuriously. Mr. and Mrs. Seton had arrived at "The Cottage,"—the pretty little house in which poor Mrs. Robert Shrugg had lived, being reserved for their use during the summer; not that there was not room and to spare in the great house, but Mr. Seton preferred having his own servants about him, and his own habits uninterrupted. He was also still shy on the subject of babies, and liked to do his nursing in private; for Mrs. Mowlam had so immoderately laughed when she first saw him awkwardly handling his son and heir, that he afterwards always avoided noticing his children in her presence. For Linda had presented him with twin sons; and his clerks declared he had not dared to scold one of them for days after this stupendous event. He was

seen to blush like a bashful boy when he first visited his club as a father; and for months he refused to drive out with more than one baby at a time. But he was frequently heard to chuckle, when the sound of a baby's voice floated down from the nursery regions, and he had begun to consult Linda on the great question of dinner. It may therefore reasonably be supposed he by no means disapproved of the additions to his family, and that his wife had not sunk in his estimation thereby. As for Linda, she was perfectly happy; she had a home at last where she could do as she chose. In her boys' nursery, state and formality had no place; no etiquette could regulate their squalling and abate their laughter, or curb their rebellious movements. There Linda could give vent to her feelings, certain of encouragement and support, in their shrill delight at the fair young mother's gaiety. No matter how dull the pompous dinner parties she joined and gave; no matter how tedious the practice with her

husband's accompaniment,—upstairs she knew she would find secure joys no one could take away. At Shrugg her happiness seemed perfect, especially when her husband's occasional absences in London gave her unlimited freedom and power, though she never rejoiced otherwise than unconsciously; then with Norah and Nelly the girl-mother romped and danced as of old, and made as much noise as both crowing babies put together. Thus Linda wisely plucked the roses in her path, and took no notice of the thorns.

Norah was the most sedate of the sisters now Susy's illness and death had sobered and softened her character. She was her father's right hand with the pen, as well as with the pestle and mortar; for her early tastes in chemistry, though no longer cultivated with the ardour of her energetic childhood, still existed in a degree; and a dingy back room at Shrugg was properly fitted up and dignified with the name of papa's laboratory. It was only used

on rainy days though, for Mr. Shrugg was becoming more of a farmer than a chemist, and began to find active pursuits kept gout away better than sedentary studies,—but whether at home or abroad Norah was his companion. "The young squire," Mr. Murkitroyd called her, for the manufacturer was a frequent visitor at Shrugg; and Mr. Theodore had already become suspicious of certain possible consequences to result therefrom.

It was during one of these visits Norah asked him something that had long been in her mind, but had hitherto been too sacred to give vent to in words; for the ex-surgeon always spoke to her jestingly as if she were still the enthusiastic girl of Clack days. He was in a softer mood that evening; they were returning together to the house through The Park from escorting Linda to the cottage; the shadows were lengthening on the soft grass, and the hush of evening was over all. He was going back to Leeds by the late train, and was con-

trasting the difference of the peaceful beauty of the country with the noise and glare of the town.

"I'm almost tired of work," he said. "Why should I care to heap up money?"

"Oh, don't look at it in that way," she replied. "Think what opportunities your present position gives you of doing good. Your example of comfort and kindliness must in time shame other millowners to follow your rules in their factories. You must not give up yet; it doesn't injure your health?"

She turned to him with an anxious look as she said this.

"My health! No," he answered; "but it is hopeless work to try to improve folks who don't care to be improved. My father is annoyed at what he calls newfangled nonsense; and my brother tradesmen sneer, and, I dare say, expect my fine sanitary schemes to go smash soon. I have to fight single-handed against prejudice and custom,—no one understands my motives nor cares for me."

"Well, you should get married," said Norah, "and then you'd have a listener bound to listen and approve."

No one but Norah could make such outspoken speeches, but her fearlessness was one of her charms in the eyes of her admirers.

"Ah! that's too late now," he said. "I'm like you, fated to single blessedness."

"No, you are not like me," she exclaimed. "I'm fated because no one would ever care to give up his name for mine, and also because I must keep at home and help papa; but you have no impediment. I shall come over to Leeds some day, and see if I can't find a suitable wife for you."

"I could have married once, but it's too late now." He spoke thus, not bitterly,—merely sadly.

And it was this speech that encouraged her to say what she had so long desired to say.

"I want you to tell me something,—the real truth!"

"What?"

"Will you speak the exact truth?"

"I will—if I can."

"I know you can. Do you think I caused Susy's death?"

Her face was very white, and she stood still as if lacking strength to go on.

"You?"

"Yes; I made her fall, you know. Did I kill her?"

She moved near a tree, and leaned against it for support.

"Answer the truth," she continued. "*I* think I killed her."

"No, no," he replied. "You caused the fall, certainly, but you might have played that same trick hundreds of times without any harm. Don't let such a morbid idea exist. She died really from wasting away; but that was owing to mental, not to physical causes,—her mind was too gentle to resist a great shock. I can see her case quite in a different light

now. We all tortured her poor body, when it was her spirit needed binding up. Be thankful she is happy, my poor child; don't grieve without cause."

"She told me," Norah added, still leaning by the tree, "to tell you how grateful she felt for all your kindness; she talked about you at the last a great deal—she feared she had made you unhappy."

"Sweet soul! so she did for a time," he answered. But I am glad now things are as they are. She was too sweet and gentle to be happy as the wife of a rough fellow like me. Don't you think so, candidly?"

"No." Norah spoke with a firm voice, and moved on. "She would have appreciated all your good qualities," she added.

He turned towards her.

"Would you marry such a chap? he said.

"I!" and a vivid crimson coloured her face.

"Yes," he added. "There, it's out now. I'm an old goose, Norah, I know; but just as

I felt about Susy when I knew nothing of her engagement, so I feel about you. You're only twenty, and I'm ten years older, but I shall look younger every year I spend with you; be a good girl, and come and listen and,—approve, as you say a wife's bounden duty is. You can't say I'm mercenary, you know, for I'm a rich man; and Murkitroyd and Shrugg are both such ugly names, there isn't much to choose between them."

"You've made me so happy," she faltered.

"Ah!" he interrupted, taking her hand.

"I mean about Susy," she added quickly; "and there's papa on Dapple,"—and off she started, running towards her father.

But she didn't know her suitor yet.

"Mr. Shrugg," he said, following briskly, and joining the squire's side almost as soon as Norah, "your daughter thinks I should marry, and I have been telling her I will follow her advice."

"I'm glad to hear it, very glad, only I'm

afraid I shan't like your wife; she'll keep you away from us. May I know who she is?"

"I always fancied she was a cut above me" the young man continued. "I knew her when she was a girl, and always admired her character; though I never dreamed of really caring for her beyond sincere friendship."

The squire laughed. "I hope she's pretty," he said.

Mr. Murkitroyd glanced over the horse's neck at Norah.

"Pretty!" he replied, "she's considered very handsome. Oh, yes, she is really a very good-looking girl; but I never thought of that until to—until lately."

"Well, Norah, shall we give our consent?" Mr. Shrugg said, turning to his pet.

Again Mr. Murkitroyd bent forward, and as he did so, Norah bashfully slackened her pace.

"Papa," she said, with heightened colour, "don't believe a word he says,—he's very stupid."

"Holloa!" and Mr. Shrugg glanced from her blushing face to Mr. Murkitroyd. "Holloa! Why,—what's all this?"

"Mr. Shrugg," the manufacturer cried, "be good enough to listen to me,—not to her at all. She recommended me to get married, and you know I'm not conceited; and I seriously didn't think the girl I'd choose would choose me,—and I said so, but Miss Norah seemed not to agree with me; so, as she was very amiable just then, I asked her if she'd have me; and instead of giving a direct answer to a direct question, she took to her heels and ran away to you. That's the simple fact of the case."

"Bless me! how very extraordinary. Why Murkitroyd,—Norah!"

"No, no," Mr. Murkitroyd interrupted; "it'll be Norah Murkitroyd."

"Papa, do stop him," Norah pleaded.

"Tell you what it is," Mr. Shrugg exclaimed, "you are two of the most extraordinary people

I ever knew; but if you are fooling me, I tell you I don't like it."

Mr. Murkitroyd instantly dropped his bantering tone.

"You are right," he said, "it is too serious a matter for laughter; in all solemnity, therefore, I do wish to make her my wife."

"You are a good fellow, Murkitroyd, but I never thought you'd try to take her from me. Well, Norah, dear, it rests with you,—in my opinion you are too good for a king; but I suppose I can't expect to keep you all!"

"Papa, I don't want to leave you."

Mr. Murkitroyd walked round to her side.

"Going to Leeds won't be leaving him," he said; "but, of course, if you object to me"—

Norah turned towards him.

"That is unkind," she said.

"Then you don't object?"

"Perhaps in ten years time—" she began, with downcast eyes, but a roguish smile on her lips.

Her father waited to hear no more; he gave a sigh, and then hit his horse and trotted on, leaving them together.

"There's only Nelly now," he said to his wife, after telling her what had passed. "I should think they can't all get married,—and she's only fifteen yet; but I never can manage without Norah. I remember having a horrible dread of that man when I first saw him. I understand why now; but he's a good fellow,—a very good fellow."

Every one said they were the queerest lovers alive; such perpetual quarrelling—in public, that is to say—such arguing, such contradiction surely never passed between any other engaged couple. First, Mr. Murkitroyd was for immediate marriage; he said his mills turned out linen enough,—why need she trouble to buy a trousseau? He thought the amount of finery she already possessed was enough for any reasonable woman, married or single,—what did she want with more? They had

known each other long,—why was there to be any delay? And then he threatened to go off and marry Crocodilla Clacker, who was after all much the most fitting wife for him.

But Miss Shrugg, of Shrugg, was much too important a person to be hustled out of single blessedness like any penniless spinster. Her wedding was to be so solemnized as to afford pleasant memories for many years to come, and to others beside herself, she said. So all the mill-hands at Leeds were feasted in true Yorkshire style, and received substantial gifts besides; and at Shrugg and Clack such grand doings had not been known since Mr. Francis Shrugg's father,—the poor young man who died so sadly in the hunting field—was married.

"I mean to take the upper hand at once, and for ever," said the bridegroom, when the bride bade him do something for the benefit of his work-people to which he objected. "You're duty is to listen meekly, and approve of all I do and say."

And Norah laughed, and said,—practice and preaching were two different things. Nevertheless, no couple in all England were happier than were Mr. and Mrs. Murkitroyd-Shrugg. Their mills were patterns of good order and thorough ventilation; their work-people were the healthiest and best conducted in all the manufacturing districts. Norah's life was the busiest and most useful of all her sisters, and her happiness was as great as Margaret's,—"Beautiful Mrs. John Dale," as Margaret was justly termed; but Margaret was a great lady in the world of London, while Norah's greatness was local. Johnny Dale was working well, and was already high up on the ladder of diplomatic fame. He and his wife were kindred spirits. Their house in London was a favourite resort for the leading men of the day. In it were to be seen neither dogs nor hunting-whips nor guns; but during the recess Johnny returned to his old pursuits in Yorkshire, and Margaret was Diana once more, but Diana

of a softer cast than the haughty beauty that first won the young squire's admiration.

Mr. Shrugg did his best to keep one daughter by his side. He refused to take Nelly to balls, he overwhelmed her with affection, and did his best to spoil her,—thinking to bind her so firmly to home that she would never care to leave it.

But Nelly disappointed him, too. Her marriage was the most brilliant of all, and so enchanted her brother-in-law, Mr. Polkely Seton, that in the joy of his heart he permitted Linda to play dance-music to his children, and even desecrated his own musical abilities to the same level. But then it is not every one who has a brother-in-law an earl, —and Nelly had married no less a personage.

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Digitized with financial assistance from the
Government of Maharashtra
on 18 July, 2018